

Philosophy and Methods of Conflict Research
CONF 610:001 Fall 2015

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with purpose.
-Zora Neale Hurston-

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Office Hours: Wednesday 4:00-6:00 p.m. and by appointment

Course time and locations: Monday, 7:20-10:00 p.m., Arlington Founder's Hall 118
mymason.gmu.edu (courses)

Course Description

This course introduces students to the philosophies behind social science research and the methods for conducting inquiry relevant to analyzing and resolving conflict that can be applied in our own efforts. The concepts we will cover include the identification of valid knowledge (*epistemology*), the nature of the world and how we identify what we study (*ontology*), and the means (*methodology*) by which we conduct research to test existing knowledge or generate new knowledge about conflicts and conflict resolution. Even as you craft individual research plans, we will be giving equal attention to putting methodological choices and actions in analytic perspective, recognizing them as *choices* that produce specific ways of knowing. Throughout the semester we will consider issues that affect inquiry across a spectrum of research approaches, from classic concerns with sampling to safety in the field and reflexivity.

This course provides an overview of the research process and asks that you acquire hands-on experience with that process. Accordingly we will focus on the:

- 1) identification of research problems within particular conflict situations and interventions
- 2) selection of appropriate research methods for the problem at hand
- 3) design of effective inquiry
- 4) articulation of underlying reasoning and research values

Course Objectives

- Develop familiarity with research concepts and tools for examining and analyzing conflict and conflict resolution and be able to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of different methods.
- Demonstrate ability to frame and communicate a feasible research question pertinent to conflict resolution and design research to answer it.
- Improve ability to critically evaluate research, your own and that of other social scientists and professionals.
- Gain skills in locating and assessing research relevant to conflict and conflict resolution from different academic disciplines.

- Understand research in multiple contexts, including academic, organizational, and community contexts and develop awareness of the expectations of different audiences and applications.
- Understand the ethical implications of research.

Course Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

Active engagement: Research skills, like any other skills, can best be acquired through practice, reflection and application. Therefore class members will learn by doing in all aspects of the course. Most of our time will be divided between discussion, hands-on exercises and peer feedback on research proposals. I expect you to have studied the required readings prior to class. Take time to digest the new methods and ideas before you come to class and be prepared to apply them or to ask about points that remain unclear. Many weeks we will spend some time hearing from class members on the development of your research proposal. Perhaps the most important part of the course is this process of creating a research community that shares ideas, experiences, expertise, challenges, and reflective thought. Everyone must come to class prepared to offer constructive feedback and suggestions. Since these assignments build on each other, you will be able to leverage your work and your understanding most effectively by completing and reflecting on each piece as assigned. Expect this course to have a moderate to heavy workload. Ask questions and raise concerns. If something is unclear or is not working effectively for you educationally, please tell me. I am reachable by e-mail and/or during office hours and by appointment.

Missed classes: As this class is taught in a seminar/discussion format, its success depends on active and sustained participation by all those in the course. The more each person participates, the more learning will take place for everyone. If you miss a class, you should take responsibility for finding out what you missed and get the notes from a colleague. You will be asked to evaluate your own participation in and preparedness for class at the end of the semester. One “life happens” missed class is acceptable if needed; additional missed classes may impact the final grade.

Due dates: You are responsible for completing assignments on time. Late assignments may be penalized.

Incompletes: In keeping with departmental and Mason policy, incomplete grades will be given only in cases of personal or family illness or emergency. It is important to complete all work on schedule, but if there are extenuating circumstances; such as sickness, family issues, or religious observances that conflict with our schedule, please let me know as soon as possible—I will try to accommodate your needs.

Assignments: All assignments should be double-spaced and use standard Times New Roman, 12 point font. Consistent use of a standardized citation format is required.

Assistance: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

The ability to write papers that are clear, analytical and your own work is essential. If you aren't already good at this, you can learn. The Writing Center is available to all Mason students and offers online and individual consultations as well as workshops and mini-courses. Writers at all levels can benefit. Each Mason campus has a location. You can find them on the Arlington Campus in the Founder's Hall, Room 212, by phone at (703) 993-4491, by email at wcenter@gmu.edu or online at: writingcenter.gmu.edu/

Academic integrity: 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 <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/>. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review. With specific regards to plagiarism, three fundamental 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. *Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Paraphrased material must also be cited. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient.* 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.

The writing center provides excellent resources on research and avoiding plagiarism at: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/resources-template.php?id=1>. I strongly recommend that you review requirements regarding use, paraphrasing and citation of sources early in the drafting of your papers.

Diversity at Mason: George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

The reflection of Mason's commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond policies and procedures to focus on behavior at the individual, group and organizational level. The implementation of this commitment to diversity and inclusion is found in all settings, including

individual work units and groups, student organizations and groups, and classroom settings; it is also found with the delivery of services and activities, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching, events, advising, research, service, and community outreach.

Course Materials

We will be using the following required texts:

Creswell, John W. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches, 4th Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013.

Kvale, Steinar. *Doing interviews*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008.

Robson, Colin. *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers, 3rd Edition*. United Kingdom: Wiley Publishing, 2011.

Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods, 5th Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013.

Additional required readings (journal articles, research examples) and supplemental materials are posted to the class Blackboard website. Several assignments will utilize the discussion section for posting and feedback. All students are responsible for downloading and reading assignments *before* they are discussed in class. The course website is at: mymason.gmu.edu

Course Requirements

Active Engagement: (15%) Attendance is extremely important as the course is interactive and elicitive. Participation is critical to your learning; students will be expected to engage each other in discussions about the assigned readings and research proposals. You can also participate by asking questions, circulating emails, organizing study groups, exchanging writing, or introducing new ideas and resources.

Research Journal: Keeping a journal provides another mechanism for active engagement with the readings and concepts. When kept from the initial attempts to formulate a question through the analysis of results this can provide an invaluable record of your progress as well as a place to work out difficult aspects of a particular project and for closer examination of our own assumptions and decisions as researchers. Informal prompts will be given on suggested journaling topics and an online space is provided on the Blackboard site. At a minimum, the research log is a place to engage with the readings and a place to record questions raised by the readings before each class. At the end of the course a final entry will be a self-assessment. Due: November 30th.

Exam/Quizzes: (5%) One short answer and multiple choice question quiz will be posted online mid-semester covering key concepts in social science research.

Problem Statement and Literature Review: (20%)

These are the first steps in the development of your research proposal. In this assignment, you will identify an area of investigation, the literature which informs your topic, and the key conceptual elements of your inquiry. You should frame a problem and a study that could be completed over the course of the semester. The problem statement should contain:

- A basic introduction to the problem you are investigating.
- Analytic discussion of why this problem is significant.
- The purpose of your study. What is your aim?
- Questions or hypotheses that guide your investigation with identification and definition of key concepts.

In conjunction with your problem statement you will include a review of relevant literature to identify important conceptual elements and relationships, as well as the best methods for inquiry. The goal here is to increase and demonstrate your familiarity with the subject and to locate the problem within existing sources and resources. The literature review should contain:

1. An overview of the arguments and key concepts regarding the problem or question.
2. An analysis of current literature to a) define for your study relevant concepts and relationships, and b) identify strengths, deficiencies and the gaps or continuing questions where your inquiry fits.

Length: approximately 6 to 8 pages. We will work with your initial drafts of the problem statement and literature review in class and online prior to the final due date. Due: October 5

Draft Research Design: (25%) This assignment is a 5 to 6 page paper extending your Problem Statement and Literature Review into a research design that details the research approach, reasoning, and the methods you plan to use to collect and analyze data. The research design outlines the approach and procedures that will ensure that data you will collect is relevant, credible, and obtained systematically. As with the literature review, you should utilize and reference sources that inform your design concerns and decisions. The draft research design should contain:

- A *brief* (½ to ¾ page) reintroduction of your problem and a clear, concise statement of your hypotheses/questions.
- An overview of your research design, including the data collection and analysis methods you intend to use. Be sure to explain why this design suits the problem at hand.
- A sampling scheme or where you plan to obtain your data.
- A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of your design and data collection and how you plan to address any weaknesses.
- A description of the portion of the research design you intend to pilot for the purposes of producing your final Pilot Research Report.

Due dates: Draft due for peer review October 19. Final due October 26.

Research Portfolio: (35%) The culminating assignment for this course is a research portfolio that contains several elements. The first is a proposal submitted as though you were applying for funding from a particular agency. Maximum length is 15 to 20 pages excluding appendices. The proposal should include elements from all of the previous assignments—*significant editing and revising is expected*. You will also include in the portfolio a summary report (4-5 pages) on your pilot study addressed to fellow researchers. Portfolio contents:

- Proposal integrating your revised Problem Statement, a refined version of your Literature Review, and your revised Research Design. Your conclusion should include some indication of your final product and how you plan to disseminate it.
 - Appendices to proposal:
 - A work plan including a timeline for completion of a final study.
 - A resources required section with categories.
 - Human subjects review application.
 - Draft research instruments for your pilot study. Depending on your study design these may include interview questionnaires, survey instruments, focus group guides and questionnaires, observation protocols, coding guides and/or document collection protocols.
- Pilot report:
 - A description of the pilot research you performed
 - An analysis of the pilot research you performed: how you did it, what you learned and how it has affected your research design
 - Reflections on your role as the researcher and the research process
- Concept Map (may have multiple versions)

Final Research Portfolio: Due Monday, December 14 by midnight.

Initial Class Schedule and Assignments

(Note: This schedule may be modified during the semester)

Week 1, August 31:

Introduction to the course, administrative matters, conflict interests, research background.
Research as awareness and observation, dilemmas of data collection.

Reading: Simonelli, “*Field School in Chiapas*” (in class, webpage)

To do: Brainstorm questions and problems in conflict resolution (in class)

Week 2, September 14:

Social science research and inquiry. Overview of research approaches: inductive and deductive, qualitative and quantitative, positivists and constructivists.

Reading: Creswell, Chapter 1
Robson, Part One—Chapters 1 & 2

Research examples: Selections from *Peace and Conflict*, special issue on Forgiveness (online)

To Do:

- a) Review the articles on forgiveness. Which studies did you find most appealing? Difficult? Why? How would you categorize the studies? (see worksheet)
- b) Initial Problem Identification, before class. Your first assignment will be to draft one page (200-400 words) detailing a problem in conflict resolution that you feel needs to be investigated. This assignment will lead to your literature review and research question, so you should try to think of something that interests you, that you have some knowledge about and that is researchable. Post to class web page prior to class and respond with feedback to at least two classmates before the next class.

Week 3, September 21:

Problems & questions in conflict analysis & resolution. Developing questions; designing research. Concept mapping. Turning questions into research. Locating background material and understanding what you’ve found. Problem statements. Hypotheses and research questions.

Reading: Creswell, Chapters 2 & 3
Robson, Chapter 3 and Chapter 15 (Writing a Project Proposal)

Research example: *Effects of Race, Sex, and Victims’ Reasons for Victim-Offender Dialogue*, Ian M. Borton and *An Account of Day Laborers in Fairfax County*, DHMHS

Week 4, September 28:

Designing the inquiry overview. Fixed and flexible designs. Peer discussion of concept maps.

Reading: Creswell, Chapters 4, 5, 6
Robson: Chapter 4
Yin, Chapter 1

Research example: Kapanake & Mullet, “*Judging the Acceptability of Amnesties: A Togolese Perspective*”

To do: Concept mapping of literature review before class, peer review during class.

Week 5, October 5:

Flexible designs: Case Studies

Reading: Creswell, *Qualitative Research Questions & Qualitative Procedures* (partial Ch. 7 and 9, pp. 129-132, 173-202 in 3rd edition)
Robson, Chapter 6
Yin, Chapter 2

Research examples: *Intercultural conflict, Track 11/2* (case studies)

To do: Problem Statement and Literature Review due.
Online quiz will be available for the next two weeks.

***Week 6, October 13: CLASS MEETS TUESDAY, due to Columbus Day (no Tues. classes)**

Fixed designs. Design focus: Experiments and Surveys, Thinking with numbers and structure.

Reading: Creswell: *Quantitative Questions & Methods* (partial Ch. 7 and 8)
Robson, Chapter 5

Research examples: Tjosvold, et al. ‘*Is the Way You Resolve Conflicts...*’ (survey); Lilliea & Janoff-Bulmana, “*Macro versus Micro Justice... TRC’s*” (Quasi-experiment); Allen, “*Violence and voice...*”(grounded theory)

Week 7, October 19:

Research designs: Action and Evaluation research. Issues in research: subjects or partners? Data collection Part I.

Reading: Robson, Chapter 8
Yin, Chapters 3-4

Research examples: Kaomea, “*Dilemmas of an Indigenous Academic...*” & Wayne, Ellen. (2008) “*Is it just talk?...Evaluating Intergroup Dialogue.*”

To Do: Draft research design due for peer review and discussion in class.

Week 8, October 26:

Data collection: Questionnaires and Interviewing. Issues of access, trust. Operationalizing concepts and writing questions.

Reading: Robson, Part III, Chapters 10-11, Part IV
Kvale, Chapters Chapters 1-6

Research examples: Chakravarty and Norman, *Trust in conflict zones*

To do: Research design due.

Week 9, November 2:

Data collection and operationalizing concepts continued. Observation and archival data. Validity. Primary and secondary sources.

Reading: Robson, Chapters 13-14
Kvale, Chapter 6-7, 10

Research examples: Martín Peña & Opatow, *The legitimization of political violence: A case study of ETA in the Basque country* and Gwartney, et al “*Measuring Long Term Impact...*”

To do:

Week 10, November 9: (Dr. Schoeny in Malta) Guest Lecturer

Analyzing data: qualitative approaches. Representation, authenticity.

Reading: Robson, Chapter 17 and Part V Introduction
Kvale, Chapters 9 and 11-12
Yin, Chapter 5

Research examples: TBD and Goldberg and Shaw, “*The secrets of successful (and unsuccessful) mediators.*” Hole, “*Working between languages...*”

To do: Peer review of instruments for pilot. Post online for comments.

Week 11, November 16: (Dr. Schoeny in Malta) Guest Lecturer

Analyzing data: quantitative approaches. Numeracy for reading quantitative research.

Reading: Robson, Introduction to Part V and Chapter 16
Review Creswell, Chapter 8

Research example: TBA—online.

To Do: Work on pilot.

Week 12, November 23:

Research ethics and principles. Standards of quality.

Reading: Robson, Chapter 9
Kvale, Chapter 3 review

Research examples: research ethical dilemmas cases, and “*Going deep and giving back...*”

To do:

Week 13, November 30:

Issues in conflict analysis and resolution research revisited: audiences, context, researcher role, violence in the field. Are we asking the right questions? Violence and safety in field research.

Reading:
Research examples: *Conducting Research in the Middle East’s Conflict Zone*, *Ethnographic Research after Violent Conflicts*, and *The Safety Dance....*

To do: Journal wrap up, final entry and self-assessment

Week 14, December 7:

Reporting on research. Presentations, discussion and wrap-up of the semester. Evaluations.

Reading:
Robson, Chapter 18
Yin, Chapter 6
Kvale, Chapter 11

Monday, December 14:

Research Portfolio due by midnight.

Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving... John Dewey

I have yet to see any problem, however complicated, which, when you looked at it the right way, did not become still more complicated.
-- Paul Alderson (1926-...) in "New Scientist", 25 September 1969, 638