Further updates will only appear on the online syllabus—check there for changes!!

Logistics

- **Meeting place:** Primarily Blackboard 9.1 (often referred to somply as Bb). On occasion we will use telephone, chat, or video conferencing (using Blackboard Collaborate, Skype, Google Hangout) with small groups, individual students and/or the instructor. We will not have any full class video conferences or synchronous meetings.
- **Weekly schedule:** Each week runs Monday-Sunday starting on August 31, 2015. *Although we will not be "meeting" as a group, active involvement every week is required. **Please check the week's folder on Sunday or Monday to see what's going on each week.*** Although all of the course units are 2 or 3 weeks long, checking for changes or things you might have missed at the beginning of each week is always wise.
- **Technology Requirements for this Course**: Please see "Technology Requirements" on the Course Menu in Blackboard. Download the software indicated onto your computer for use in the course. Pay special attention to the Blackboard supported browsers and operating systems.

Instructors

- **Guy Burgess, Ph.D. and Heidi Burgess, Ph.D.**
- **Contact Info:**
- **Phone***: 303-492-1635. Email is usually better than voice mail for messages, however.
- **Email:** hburgess@gmu.edu and gburges2@gmu.edu,
  OR burgess@colorado.edu gets both of us at the same "place."
- **Office Hours:** by appointment by phone or online (email to arrange a time and a medium: telephone, Blackboard Collaborate, Skype, or Google Hangout.)

Texts

- **Paper Texts:** none

- **Other Readings:** All the readings will be online with links to those readings found on the weekly schedule. Many of these are freely available on the web, in which case we link directly to the resource. Others (scanned chapters of books, for example) will be posted in the content section of Bb in the week in which it is assigned.
- **Beyond Intractability resources:** A number of the readings for this course come from Beyond Intractability, and most of the mini-lectures are posted there as well, as we are using them in several different courses at other universities. In order to access the mini-lecture videos and powerpoints, you will need to enter another user name and password--unfortunately, a different one from your GMU user name and password. But it is easy to remember, and you only need to enter it once. It is "CONF756" for both the user name and password.

  BI is dependent upon user contributions. We, therefore, routinely ask students, who use the system as "text" for their courses, to make a modest, $25 contribution as their fair share of the cost of operating the system. The funds do not go to Guy or Heidi, but rather help pay for the servers and other computing needs. You can either send a check made out to the Conflict Information Consortium to: Conflict Information Consortium, UCB 580, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309-0580, or you can donate by credit card to our account at the University of Colorado Foundation.

Course Description

Note: If you read the "welcome" already, the first two paragraphs will be repeated material. After that, we present new ideas, so please read on!
This course is about the biggest problems facing our communities, our nation, and our world today. Ones that quickly come to our minds — and probably yours — are human security (freedom from the fear of war, and/or terrorism, as well as unmet fundamental human needs), the economy (jobs, deficits, budgets, debt ceilings, housing, poverty, etc.), social services (health care, education, the justice system, etc.), and the environment (particularly climate change, energy and resources, and air and water quality, arable land, habitat, etc.).

Our communities, our nations (the US and others), and the world have proven remarkably unable to "solve" any of these problems. Why? We assert it is because they are all underlain by a more fundamental problem — the inability to constructively deal with difficult and intractable conflicts. These conflicts prevent us as individuals, organizations, and governments (at all levels) from making wise decisions or taking effective action that will address any of these pressing problems. We are stuck, in many cases, in what William Zartman calls a "hurting stalemate:" a situation in which combatants battle each other instead of the problem, and nothing ever gets solved — or, often, even addressed. Other intractable conflicts remain latent — for instance when oppression or inequality is so severe that the downtrodden don't even have the ability to fight for their rights or needs.

While "traditional conflict resolution" (which, somewhat ironically, 30 years ago was named "ADR" for "alternative dispute resolution,") is well able to settle or resolve a vast majority of "tractable" conflicts and disputes, there are a significant number of really difficult problems that seem largely unresponsive to standard ADR techniques.

Many mediators purposely shy away from these conflicts. Several years ago, the predecessor to the Association for Conflict Resolution — then called SPIDR (Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution) — put out a "definitive" (for the time) handbook on mediating environmental conflicts. A large part of the handbook was spent explaining which conflicts could be mediated and which not. SPIDR members were advised to avoid the ones that were unlikely to respond positively to mediation because it would be a waste of everyone's time, and a threat to the mediators' (and the field's) reputations. If it can't be mediated, the implication was, stay away from it! Unfortunately, in much conflict resolution scholarship and practice, this attitude has changed remarkably little. That advice long intrigued us, and like adolescents who refuse to listen to their parents, we were drawn toward such conflicts. If they can't be mediated, doesn't that suggest we ought to be doing something else? What? Is there really no solution but to suffer through? Will we ever be able to get to the other side of these conflicts? At what cost?

We have now been studying intractable conflicts for over 25 years. Our primary contribution to the field's knowledge on this topic is a vast website called [Beyond Intractability](#) or "BI" for short, which we, together with about 50 other people, created in 2003. We still co-direct and co-edit the site, which is now in the process of being updated, currently has over 400 contributors and over 120,000 unique users each month from all over the world. Starting last year, we have been actively recruiting SCAR students and faculty to participate in and contribute to BI, and many have done so. We hope you will too, in the context of this class, and perhaps later on as well.

The second substantive focus of this class is complexity. Most intractable conflicts are very complex — so understanding the nature of complexity and its implications for conflict analysis and intervention is essential if any of these conflicts are to be effectively analyzed or transformed. We will be using a variety of systems theories and approaches to analyze intractable conflicts, and to design interventions or sets of interventions that hold promise for transforming these very destructive conflicts into something more productive — even when they cannot (and quite possibly should not) be resolved all together.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course we expect students to:

1. Understand what causes some conflicts to become intractable, while others do not.
2. Be able to analyze complex intractable conflicts using "complexity thinking" and conflict mapping

3. Be able to design interventions for complex intractable conflicts that are likely to influence the conflict system in a positive way.
4. Know how to adapt general theoretical and practical knowledge to specific conflict circumstances.

Course Procedures and Expectations *Back to Top*

Weeks and Units: Just like a face-to-face class, this class "meets" for 15 weeks, starting Monday August 31 and ending Friday Dec. 11, with final projects due Tues. Dec. 15. The details about all the activities required for each unit and week are found in the Weekly Schedule (below) and also in the unit folders under the content link on the left side navigation bar on Blackboard.

In some respects, the course activities try to emulate a face-to-face class. But we will also do a number of things that take advantage of the fact that we are online, not face-to-face. While some people think being online is a detriment, and leads to an inferior class experience, it actually can be a benefit -- leading to a superior class experience. For instance, online classes allow you to "attend" and work on the class on your own schedule, not a pre-set schedule, and allow you to take the class from anywhere in the world. I don't know where our first group of students is coming from — but I'm hoping we'll have a rich diversity of participants from many different places — more than is often possible with a face-to-face class.

Online classes also allow everyone to interact with everyone else more than sometimes happens in face-to-face settings. We don't have the dynamic of outgoing, talkative people "drowning out" shyer, quieter people — at least not so much. But in order to get the benefits of online learning, it is critical that everyone really engages with the material, with us (the instructors) and with each other.
So we have created multiple ways to encourage you to do that, and we are further encouraging participation by making it a full 50% of your grade!

We will "mix and match" a variety of interactive activities throughout the semester, including:

- Discussion questions
- Small group exercises
- Optional group paper (the semester project is not optional, but doing it as a group, rather than individually, is an option)
- Peer reviews
- An open discussion forum where you can post questions or thoughts about the readings or lectures that don't seem to "fit" in any of the other required interaction activities.
- Details about each of these activities is found on Blackboard and also below, following the week-by-week schedule.

While the expectations vary a bit from week to week, most units are two weeks long and contain:

- **3-5 "mini-lectures**" which are 10-15 minute long "framing lectures" on the topic(s) of the unit
- **A set of readings** Usually about 100-120 pages for a two-week unit - due in time to respond to the discussion questions in week 2 (see below).
- **Discussion question(s)** -Usually due 9 am Tuesday morning in the second week of the unit. This gives you almost a week and a half toview the videos and complete the readings and then write a discussison post based on the readings and lectures, yet it still leaves you several days to respond to your peers' discussion posts. (Responses to peers are usually due 9 am Friday morning.)   If 3 days is not enough time to do that, we can change the reading due date to Monday (or even earlier), but since there is a lot of reading for each unit, we wanted to give you as much time to do this as possible.)
- Other assignments are superimposed and interspersed with the discussion questions—including some group exercises and the semester project. When two assignments are due at the same time, we urge you to work on at least one early in the week and/or unit; and the other after that. Don't leave them both to the last minute! You are welcome to turn in things early!!

- Starting on week 3, you will also begin working on your **semester project** which has three parts:

  - a topic proposal (due 9 am Friday Sept 25),
  - a linked set of graphical conflict maps (draft due 9 am Friday Oct 23 and final due 9 am Nov. 6.) and
  - an analysis of alternative theories of change along with three intervention concept papers (500-750 words each). Drafts are due 9 am Tuesday Dec 1, and, finals versions are 9 am Tues. Dec. 15. (Friday was too late to get the grades in on time.)
  - Details about the semester project are found on the link on the Bb sidebar.

The Bottom Line: GET INVOLVED, STAY INVOLVED!!!

This class allows more flexibility than a traditional face-to-face class, but it also requires consistent engagement. You need to do the readings on time in order to successfully engage in the interactive activities, and these activities are as essential to your learning as the readings and papers. The more you engage with your peers—as well as with the material and your instructor—the more you (and your peers) will benefit.

But also be sure to follow the guidelines for effective, respectful interaction. We want this to be a safe place for different (including conflicting!) viewpoints to be discussed. We, more than anyone, should understand that conflict is a driver of learning—if it is done in a constructive, respectful way.

Lastly, if you have questions or problems, please get in touch with us quickly. Don't let problems build until they are intractable!

University Policy Requirements

- **Monitor your MasonLive Email:** Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. For accessibility and privacy, the university, school, and program will send communications to students solely through their Mason email account — students should respond accordingly.
- **Student Privacy**: Student Privacy and Student Rights under FERPA can be found at: https://registrar.gmu.edu/students/privacy/
- **Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester (See http://ods.gmu.edu). Information about needed documentation is included here: http://ods.gmu.edu/students/documentation.php.
- **Honor Code and Virtual Classroom Conduct:** Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code (See http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/)). We value critical thinking and therefore, it is imperative that students read the assigned books and articles by their assigned due dates with a critical eye. Curiosity, active thought, quality of inputs, attentiveness to new (and challenging) ideas, and *RESPECT* for others should be your guiding principles. Also keep in mind basic rules of "netiquette"; students must carefully craft their communication in the online classroom carefully to avoid misinterpretation whenever possible. That said (and this is Heidi speaking, not GMU policy people), we do need to be able to discuss conflict issues and topics about which we might strongly disagree. We just need to be sure to use good conflict communication skills, focusing on the ideas in constructive ways-- using "I statements" instead of "you statements" for instance.
- **University Libraries:** University Libraries provides resources for distance students. (See http://library.gmu.edu/distance). Also see the links to "Library Help" on the left side menu page toward the bottom.
- **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). The writing center does have an online presence and is available to students who are not physically located at gmu.
- **The Counseling and Psychological Services Office** is also available to Mason online students. See: (http://caps.gmu.edu/)

- **Work Ethic:** CONF 756 is designed as a collaborative learning experience. It is important that students participate in every unit and activity and that they contribute actively to groups and class discussions. Please participate enthusiastically in group activities while respecting the opinions and valuing the work of other group members. However, any individual work should be strictly your own. Presenting another's work as your own (plagiarism) will result in a zero grade for the assignment. Also, please let me know how your final paper relates to your previous academic work — it is a problem if you just recycle a previously-written paper. While a powerful tool, please use the Internet with caution. Reference your sources, resist the temptation to cut and paste material into your own work, and use independent validation of the information where appropriate.

   To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: **Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.**

Assignment Details

Discussion Questions: There are six discussion questions over the course of the semester, plus several other assignments and exercises. For each of these discussion questions, Guy and Heidi will ask a thought provoking question (or two or three) to try to get you to think about and apply the readings and lecture material to the "real world" in some way. The goal is to stimulate a discussion. To do this, you will be asked to post your own answer on the discussion board by 9 am the second Tuesday of the unit (usually)--sometimes the due date is different. Watch the calendar and check the due dates on the content area for each unit!

- o You will then be asked to read the answers of everyone in your "discussion group" (groups will be randomly assigned for a month or so at a time) and respond to at least three of the people in your discussion group by 9 am Friday (three days later). You are welcome (even encouraged) to respond earlier—giving more time for a real discussion. You are also welcome to respond to people who are not in your discussion group if you are so inclined. (And your "participation" grade will reflect the extra involvement.)
- o The grading rubric for discussion questions is available on the "rubrics" link on the left side menu bar of Bb.
- o Details about each discussion topic are found in the discussion board folders (also on left side menu bar).

   Mapping Experimentation: During the mapping unit (weeks 5 and 6) we will be asking you to work in a group of 3 or 4 people to create two "experimental" conflict

maps about Iraq and ISIS. The goal is to learn about and practice conflict mapping in a group—which is a much better way to do it than by yourself. This experience should help you be better able to create the conflict maps you will need to create as part of your semester project. We will assign groups by the end of week 4 and post them to Bb. You will have two weeks to work together (via Blackboard Collaborate, Google Hangout, Skype, or email) to create two maps, which will need to be posted by 9 am Friday Oct. 9.

o   You will post these maps, also, to the discussion board, even though they are not a discussion, per se. This enables everyone to see everyone else's maps—and we encourage you to look at them all to learn even more about alternative approaches to conflict mapping.

Semester Project: Starting on Week 3, you will also be asked to begin work on your semester project. This project asks you to choose one particular complex, intractable conflict to focus on for the full semester. After you do a topic proposal and get your topic approved, you will create a series of conflict maps about it, and then use those maps to develop three possible interventions to transform a particular aspect of the conflict. Details can be found here.

- *Things to keep in mind regarding all assignments:*
o   As we have said before (sorry if we seem like a "nag,") it is important to complete all work on schedule, and, for "interaction elements," you are encouraged to do these as early in the week/unit as possible, to allow time for a robust and thoughtful discussion.
o   **If there are extenuating circumstances however, such as sickness, family issues, or religious observances that conflict with our schedule, please let us know as soon as possible — we will try to accommodate your needs.**
o   *Similarly, if you find your grades are not meeting your expectations, talk to us promptly and we will figure out what needs to be done to correct the situation. Don't leave it until the end of the semester when there is very little that we can do.*

Grade Details

- **NOTE:** Grading is on a 1000 point scale. This means that you can divide the points for each assignment by 10 to yield the percentage of your grade attributable to that assignment. For example, a 300 point assignment=30% of your grade; 120 point = 12%.

- **Discussion Board posts**: 50 points / set; 6 sets = 300.
- **Exercises**
    - Group mapping experimentation: 80 points
    - The meeting place part 1= 50 points
    - The meeting place part 2 = 30 points
    - Total = 160 points.

- **"Extra" Participation points** 40 points - These will be allocated based on our overall sense of the degree to which you engaged in the class and added to the discussions in a positive way. People who seemed very engaged an contributed a lot will get all 45 points; people who seemed to do the minimum necessary to "get by" will get considerably less.
- **Semester project: 500 points divided up as follows:**

    - Proposal = 25 points
    - Draft map = 25 points - these points are lost if the map is turned in late.
    - Peer review of maps = 25 points
    - Final Map and documentation = 225 points
    - Draft Concept Papers = 25 points - These points are lost if the concept paper is turned in late.
    - Peer review of concept paper = 25 points
    - Final Concept Papers = 150
    - Total for all elements of the paper = 500 points
- **Total points for course = 1000 points.**

- **Grade scale:**
    - 1000–970 = A+
    - 930-969 = A
    - 900-929 = A-
    - 870-899 = B+
    - 830-869 = B
    - 800-829 = B-
    - 780-799 = C+
    - 730-779 = C

Assignment Due Date and Grade Overview Chart:

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Video chat sign up	Sept 1	0
Video chat completed	Sept 11	0
D1 Intro	Sept 4	50
D2 Why not better?	Sept 8 & 11	50
D3 Complexity	Sept 22 & 25	50
D3.5 Topic Proposal	Sept 25	25
D4 Iraq Map Exp	Oct. 9	80
D5 Fists	Oct 20	50
Draft Maps	Oct 23	25
Peer Review complete	Oct 30	25

D6 Final Maps	Nov. 6	225
D7 De-Escalation	Nov 13	50
D8 Meeting Place-1	Nov. 24	50
Draft Concept Paper	Dec 1	25
D9 Meeting Place-2	Dec. 4	30
Concept Paper Review Complete	Dec 8	25
D10 Governance	Dec. 11	50
D11 Final Concept Papers	Dec. 15	150
Extra participation points	Throughout semester	50
Total		1000

Schedule Overview : (Details on Bb.)

Unit 1: Weeks 1 & 2: Aug. 31 - Sept 13 | Understanding the Problem of Intractability

- Personal Introduction and experience with Intractable Conflict due 9 am Sept 4

- Readings and videos (linked to Bb) due 9 am Sept. 6 (or soon enough to respond to the D2 discussion by Sept. 8.

- "Why haven't we done better?" discussion due 9 am Sept 8 with peer responses due 9 am Sept. 11

- Details on Bb.

Unit 2: Weeks 3 & 4: 14-27 | The Complex Nature of Intractable Conflicts

- Readings and videos due in time to complete a thoughtful discussion board post.

- Discussion board post on complexity due 9 am Sept 22 and responses to peers due 9 am Sept 25

- Semester project topic proposal due 9 am Fri. Sept 25.

- Details on Bb.

Unit 3: Weeks 5 and 6: Sept 28 – Oct. 11 | Mapping Complex Intractable Conflicts

- The main activity for this week is your mapping experimentation, done in small groups.
- The reading and videos should be completed as soon as possible, as they will allow you to do the two-week group activity.
- Watching the PBS Frontline Video "Losing Iraq" and/or reading the attached NYTimes article on Iraq is also required for doing this activity.

- The maps are due on Friday Oct. 9.
- Details on Bb.

Unit 4: Weeks 7, 8 & 9: Oct. 12 – Nov. 1 | The "Invisible Fist" in Intractable Conflicts

- Readings due in time to complete a thoughtful discussion board post.
- Discussion board post on invisible fists due 9 am Oct. 20.
- .Draft maps (for your semester project) are due to your peer review group by 9 am Fri. Oct. 23.
- Oct. 23--40 is "peer review week," during which time you will be reviewing helping to improve each others' maps.
- Details on Bb.

Unit 5: Weeks 10 & 11: Nov 2 - 15 | Moving Beyond Destructive Confrontations

- Readings and videos due in time to complete a thoughtful discussion board post.
- Discussion board post on de-escalation due 9 am Fri. Nov. 13.
- Final maps and documentation (for your semester project) are due in Bb. Nov. 6, 9 am.
- Details on Bb.

Unit 6: Weeks 12 & 13: Nov. 16 – Nov. 30 | Building Healthy Communities
- Readings and video due as soon as possible so you can start the unit exercise
- The exercise for this unit is a two part exercise, based on John Paul Lederach's story "The Meeting Place."
- Initial discussion board post on your "organizational statement" is due due 9 am Nov. 24.
- Follow up "reconciliation" post is due Fri. Dec. 4
- Draft Concept papers (part 3 of semester project is due 9 am Dec. 1 Details on Bb.

Unit 7: Weeks 14 and 15: Dec. 1 – Dec. 11: Making "Small D" Democratic Governance Work
- Readings and due in time to complete a thoughtful discussion board post.
- Draft Concept papers (part 3 of semester project is due 9 am Dec. 1
- Peer reviews are due back 9 am Dec. 8.
- Governance discussion post due 9 am Dec. 11.
- Final version of concept papers due 9 am Dec. 15.
- Details on Bb.

Questions? Confusion? Problems?
Email us, call us, or post a question on the open discussion board!!!