

CONF 330:
Community, Group and Organization Conflicts Analysis and Resolution
Fall 2013

Wednesday 4:30 pm to 7:10 pm
East, Room 122

Taught by Dr. Arthur Romano
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Office Hours:

Thursdays 1:30 to 2:30pm and by appointment at other times (Room 116, Northeast
Module II)

Course Description:

Groups, organizations and communities are powerful entities that shape the ways we think about ourselves, the ways in which we see others, and how others see us. In terms of building sustainable peace, an understanding of group dynamics can illuminate productive ways to prevent or transform destructive conflict and to build on existing resilience and strength in communities. This course will provide opportunities for students to examine a variety of social conflicts and explore theories of conflict resolution that are grounded in analysis of group dynamics. It also seeks to explore a range of methods for engaging constructively with group, organizational and community-level conflicts and to sharpen student's skills for critical thinking when embedded within or entering live conflict dynamics. It draws on a broadly interdisciplinary approach to understanding group dynamics and includes literature from the fields of conflict analysis and resolution, social psychology, global studies, management, and sociology. Through class discussions, films, case studies, academic readings and role plays of real-world conflicts, you will further develop the ability to analyze social group conflicts and consider a wide range of contingencies when formulating conflict interventions.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- Explore both problem-solving and strengths based approaches to CAR practice in group contexts
- Engage with theoretical and conceptual resources for examining group dynamics
- Deepen their awareness of the stages and variety of social conflicts
- Examine social and cultural variables that are pervasive in social conflicts including the role of power and systemic context
- Explore constructive approaches to conflict escalation and de-escalation

- Further develop critical thinking skills and the ability to communicate in writing those thoughts
 - Strengthen collaborative learning skills and the ability to work effectively in groups
 - Reflect more deeply on their own reactions, assumptions and tendencies when directly engaging with social conflict dynamics
 - Become more familiar with conflict analysis and resolution strategies that focus on group dynamics
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Required Texts:

Kriesberg, Louis. (2007). *Constructive conflicts: from escalation to resolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Block, Peter. (2008). *Community: the structure of belonging*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Brubaker, David. (2009). *The little book of healthy organizations: tools for understanding and transforming your organization*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

Course Requirements:

Participation: 25%

Regular attendance and consistent informed participation in class discussions and activities is expected. **It is critical to complete all assigned readings, journal or written reflection pieces** prior to each class so that you are prepared to engage in discussions. Also you should bring books and class materials with you to each class so that you can cite the text when needed in class. Further, you will need **to take notes** to capture the material discussed in class as most classes are discussion based and students who take notes consistently tend to do better on the mid-term and final. We will frequently engage in small group work and experiential activities so the quality of your participation and preparation is essential for maximizing learning generally and excelling on written assignments.

Group Project: 15%

In the final weeks of the class you will work in small groups **to facilitate a role-play activity and discussion** (see weekly schedule below for dates from presentations) for the

entire class that applies the concepts and theories of group dynamics in relation to conflict. The group will be responsible for creating a role-play that reveals a specific problem related to group, organizational or community conflict. The problem should help illuminate, but not solve the social problem you are acting out. Also, it should have a direct conceptual or theory from the reading (e.g., the role of power in reinforcing conflictual dynamics) that is embedded in the conflict. Most importantly, the role-plays will be based on one or more personal experiences of the team members and we will work on how to put together a successful role-play in class.

The group project (role play/group discussion) will be facilitated in class and you will be required to generate a collectively written paper briefing document that is submitted in advance of the deadline and a presentation for the class that elucidates the concepts and theories that informed your role-play.

Mid-Term Exam: 20%

This is a take-home essay examination. The exam will be posted on Blackboard on **October 9** under "Safe Assignments" and you will have two weeks to complete it and submit it **VIA SAFE ASSIGNMENTS on Blackboard** before the start of class on **October 23**. No late assignments will be accepted. The only exceptions to this policy are for those with a documented learning disability, emergent medical problem or a death in the family. In all cases, I will need to receive written documentation and discuss the issue with you. Your assignments should only contain your G number and **not your name** as the assignment will be graded anonymously. You are permitted to go to the writing center to seek feedback on your writing.

Due: October 23

Pop Quizzes: 15%

There will be three pop quizzes that will be given during class. The lowest grade of the three will be dropped. The quizzes will test you on concepts and factual information from the required readings that have been assigned for the class in which they are given. **Students are allowed to use a regular 3X5 index card with notes and reflections on the readings during the quiz. You may bring multiple index cards to class with notes on them but during the quiz you will need to pick only 1 card to use as a reference during the exam.** If you miss the quiz you get a grade of zero. If I hand out the quiz at the beginning of class, those who are late to class and miss the quiz will also get a zero. The only exceptions to these policies are for those with a documented learning disability, emergent medical problem or serious issue where I have been informed in a prompt manner. In all cases, I will need to receive written documentation and discuss the issue with you.

Final Exam (25%) The final exam is also a take-home essay examination. The exam will be posted on Safe Assignments on Blackboard on **November 20** and must be submitted on Safe Assignments on Blackboard by the start of class on **December 4**. No late

assignments will be accepted. The only exceptions to this policy are for those with a documented learning disability, emergent medical problem or a death in the family. In all cases, I will need to receive written documentation and discuss the issue with you. Your assignments should only contain your G number and **not your name** as the assignment will be graded anonymously. You are permitted to go to the writing center to seek feedback on your writing.

Due: December 4

Class Schedule

August 28: First Day

Welcome, overview of the class, class norms, syllabus, grading policy and initial exploration of group, organization and community dynamics.

September 4: Introduction to conceptions of community

Readings for class:

- Robert Bellah et al.: *Habits of the Heart*, ch 1, 2.
- John Paul Lederach: *The Moral Imagination*, ch 2.

September 11 : Introduction to the study of group dynamics.

Readings for class:

- Forsyth: Ch 1, 4
- Wheatley, Margaret. (2011). *Walk out walk on a learning journey into communities daring to live the future now*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

September 18: Examining processes of inclusion/ exclusion in groups and communities

Readings for class:

- Block: Ch 1
- Forsyth: Ch 3
- Dreier: Place Matters, Ch 3,4

September 25: Introduction to Social Conflicts

Readings for class:

- Kriesberg: Ch 1, 2
- Hirsch and Duke: Ch 2, 3

Please complete “**Getting into character**” assignment for Mountain Top simulation and hand in hardcopy in class on October 2

October 2: Mountain Top Coal Mining Simulation

Readings for class:

- Kriesberg: Ch 3, 4
- Block: Ch 2

October 9: Mountain Top Coal Mining Simulation Continued

Mid-Term Posted

Readings for class:

- Kriesberg: Ch 5, 6
- Block: Ch 3

October 16: Restorative Justice

- Boyes-Watson, Carolyn. *Peacemaking Circles and Urban Youth Hostage*, Ch 4
- Kriesberg: Ch 7
- Block: Ch 4

October 23: Focus on Gang Truce in El Salvador and Transnational Communities of Conflict Resolution Practice

Mid-Term Exam Due

Readings for class:

- A window of Hope
- Sampson, C., *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding: A Resource for Innovators*, Ch 5
- Find three articles (newspaper, web resources or academic publications) about gangs in El Salvador

October 30: Introduction to Social Movements and collective action for social change

Readings for class:

- David, S. Meyer, *How Social Movements Matter*
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., *Pilgrimage to Nonviolence, Strides Toward Freedom*
- Block: Ch 9

November 6: Models for Understanding Organizational Conflicts and the stories that hold organizations hostage.

Readings for class:

- Little book of Organizations

- Stories that hold organizations Hostage

November 13: Open Topic to be Determined

** In-class Conflict Presentation (Group Project)*

November 20: Conversational leadership and the role of dialogue in community-building.

Final Exam Posted

Readings for class:

- Sampson, C., *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding: A Resource for Innovators*, Ch 14
- Block: Ch 10, 11, 12

**In-class Conflict Presentation (Group Project)*

November 27: Thanksgiving Break

December 4: Closing, Evaluation and Appreciations

Final Exam Due

Grading:

I do not curve for this course and most assignments are graded anonymously. You may contest grades. It is in your interest to take some time to formulate your questions/concerns about your grade in advance and make them clear to me in writing before we meet. Contesting grades can cut both ways—you may make a good case for **raising your grade. However**, I may find mistakes I missed the first time and I may **deduct points** after reviewing it again.

Attendance, Late Work, Participation, and Special Needs:

- While points are not directly deducted for missed classes, not attending classes makes it difficult to participate and generally results in lower participation grades. As a rule of thumb, **more than two unexcused absences tends to result in a 25% deduction from your participation grade where more than four absences results in an F for your participation grade.**
- If you anticipate absences from this class, **PLEASE NOTIFY ME IN ADVANCE** so we can make arrangements if necessary.

•If you are absent due to illness, crisis, or unexpected obstacles, **GET IN TOUCH WITH ME** as soon as you can so we can discuss possible arrangements.

•**I STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO COMMUNICATE WITH ME** regarding absences and challenges that may disrupt your ability to complete requirements for the course.

Timely and honest communication regarding absences, trouble with assignments etc can often prevent falling behind and feeling overwhelmed and can allow us to consider creative possibilities moving forward. **With that said, I rarely accept attempts to make up for missed or late work at the end of the semester.

• In terms of content if you miss a class, it is a good practice to reach out to your classmates to get an idea of what you have missed in advance of contacting me.

•No text-messaging, personal web surfing, talking on cell phones, or private conversations. These activities are disruptive to others and will negatively affect your participation grade.

Student Resources:

English Language Institute:

The English Language Institute offers free English language tutoring to non-native English speaking students who are referred by a member of the GMU faculty or staff.

GMU Writing Center:

“The Writing Center seeks to foster a writing climate on campus and beyond by offering free writing support to George Mason students, faculty, staff and alumni. **NO MATTER WHAT YOUR WRITING ABILITIES ARE**, writing specialists can help you develop the skills you need to become a successful writer. Free services include: One-on-one 45 minute sessions with a writing specialist; online writing lab; one-on-one sessions with an ESL specialist; workshops on such topics as documenting sources, grammar and punctuation; writing handouts on a variety of subjects; a library of handbooks and writing manuals; [and an] online chat with a tutor about papers submitted to the Online Writing Lab” (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>). **I have found that students who regularly use the writing center tend to score better marks in my classes.**

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 at the beginning of the semester.**

George Mason University is committed to providing appropriate services and accommodations that allow students with disabilities to access programs and activities at the university as stated in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. To achieve this goal, the university maintains and supports the Disability Resource Center Office, which is responsible for assuring that students receive the services and accommodations to which they are entitled. The professional staff

of the Disability Resource Center Office coordinate services for students with disabilities, determine reasonable services and accommodations on the basis of disability, and act as a liaison between students and faculty/ administration on concerns relating to services and accommodations.” (<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/advising/dss.html>).

LAST BUT NOT LEAST: Honor Code and Plagiarism

All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code. You can find information about the Honor Code

at <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/resources/students.php>. 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.

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.