Philosophy and Methods of Conflict Research -- CONF 610.001 Spring 2014

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> Course time: Monday, 7:20 pm – 10.00 pm Course location: Arlington: Founder's Hall 313

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Research in conflict analysis is vital for mapping a conflict, for learning about the conflict actors - who they are, what they do, and how they think – understanding the underlying conditions/factors that drove them to engage in conflictual relations, and forecasting about their future behaviors. Conflict practitioners also rely on research in their work, for example, in designing plans for a possible intervention, learning about the conflict parties, and evaluating an intervention's outcome and impact.

This course centers on the 'what' and 'how' of research on real world conflicts and introduces students to the philosophies behind social science research and the methods for conducting research in the field of conflict resolution.

The concepts we will cover include:

Epistemology (from Greek *epistēmē*, meaning knowledge or understanding): The identification of the valid knowledge for any particular conflict situation (how can conflict analysts and/or practitioner acquire genuine knowledge of the causes, conditions, and consequences of a particular conflict? how do they determine the facts about any conflict?) **Ontology:** The nature of the world about which we try to obtain knowledge and/or how we identify what we study about conflicts (what exactly is the subject matter of conflict research, in terms of the nature of real world conflicts and their causes?) For example, are conflicts in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Chechnya, Israel/Palestine/ Rwanda, Yemen, Democratic Republic of the Congo, or elsewhere reflective of cultural, economic, identity, political, religious, and/or other dimensions? Is there any causality between certain socio-economic issue and conflict? Methodology: The means by which we conduct research into aspects of complex conflicts to test existing knowledge and/or generate new knowledge about those conflicts and conflict resolution (which methods best serve the objectives of analysts and practitioners, and how should such methods be deployed in real world research?) 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.

Particular attention is given the importance of multiple research methods that rest upon different perspectives. Accordingly, the course will focus on the:

- (1) Identification of research questions associated with particular conflict situations (how to generate research questions, how to set up a research design),
- (2) Selection of appropriate research methods for use in exploring the problem at hand (what methods should be deployed that best addresses the research questions)
- (3) Design of effective research projects

These concepts/questions will be addressed accordingly through various activities, such as applying the general concepts and themes about research to real world conflicts (actively engaging in a critical reflection of such research by probing various strengths and weaknesses), and engaging in various hands-on activities throughout the semester.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- Develop familiarity with research concepts and tools for to use in examining and analyzing conflict and conflict resolution, to evaluate the usefulness of various research approaches: content analysis, survey and field research, quantitative and qualitative analysis, and case studies
- Be able to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of different methods
- Learn or improve upon certain skills of locating and gathering research information relevant to conflict and conflict resolution from various academic sources
- Understand the central elements of thorough research designs. Accomplish specific research tasks: hypothesis construction, conceptualizing terms, to frame feasible research questions, to conduct literature review, and data collection
- Learn how to communicate the research design and results (analysis).
- Improve one's ability to critically evaluate research, your own and that of other social scientists.
- Understand forms of research for 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 skill, can best be acquired through practice, reflection and application. Therefore most of our time in class will entail class participation by class members as our time will be divided between discussion, hands-on exercises and peer feedback on research proposals. Many weeks we will spend some time hearing from class members on the development of their 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 share it in the class or tell me privately. I am reachable by e-mail and/or during office hours and by appointment.

Class Attendance & Participation, and Missed classes: As this class is taught in a seminar/discussion format, its success depends on active and regular participation by all those in the course. The more each person participates, the more learning will take place for everyone. Absenteeism seriously could affect your learning experience. 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.

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

Assistance: (1) 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 minicourses. 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/

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. For more information contact (703) 993-3660 or eli@gmu.edu or see me for a referral.

(2) 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.

GMU's Honor Policy and Academic integrity at S-CAR: GMU is an Honor Code university. 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 or in the Mason catalog. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA or APA format. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct.

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.

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. SCAR'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.

Incompletes: Per GMU policy, incomplete grades will not be granted save in cases of personal or immediate family illness or emergency.

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.

Course Materials

Required books: We will be using the following required texts.

Robson, Colin. *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitionerresearchers, 3rd Edition.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011.

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

Seidman, Irving. *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*, 4th Edition. Teachers College Press, 2012.

Yin, Robert. *Case study research: Design and methods, 5th Edition, Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 5.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013.

Required Articles: All additional readings, supplemental materials, and case studies are posted to the class website. All students are responsible for downloading and reading assignments *before* they are discussed in class. The course website is at: mymason.gmu.edu which takes you directly to GMU's Blackboard. Or you can go to <u>https://gmu.blackboard.com/</u>. To use the blackboard, allow pop ups, enter you GMU e-mail username and password and choose CONF610 spring 2014 from the menu.

Course Requirements

Active Engagement: (10%) of course grade

Attendance is extremely important as the course is interactive and elicitive. Class participation is critical to student learning and it represents an important activity of the course. Students are responsible for completing all the readings prior to class, preparing to engage in class discussion, and participating in in-class activities. You can also participate by asking questions, circulating emails, organizing study groups, exchanging writing, or introducing new ideas and resources. Assessment will be based on both frequency and quality of participation; high quality participation deepens class discussion and offers evidence of significant engagement with the readings.

Problem Statement: Research Questions and Literature Review: (20%) of course grade Due: Week 5 – February 24, 2014

The first step toward the development of your research proposal is to select a particular area of conflict of interest to you. Then to conduct a literature review by scholars who have previously studied the topic.

The problem statement section should contain:

- A basic introduction to the problem/question you are investigating.
- References to your literature review to show why this problem is significant.
 - The literature review should contain:
 - A basic definition of your problem or question.
 - An overview of the arguments and perspectives in the field regarding the problem or question.
 - An analysis of the current literature a) to define for your study relevant concepts and relationships, and b) its strengths and deficiencies and the gaps or continuing questions where your research fits, i.e., the necessity for your research.
- The purpose of your study. What is your aim?
- Research questions or hypotheses that guide your investigation.

Length: approximately six to eight 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.

Exam/Quiz: 5% of course grade

Due: Week 7 -- March 17, 2014

A short answer questions quiz will be posted online on March 7, covering some key concepts in social science research.

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Draft Research Design and Pilot Study: (30%) of course grade Due: Draft due for peer review week 9-March 24, 2014 Final due: Week 10-March 31, 2014. The research design establishes how you will systematically obtain data that is relevant to your question. This segment of the assignment is intended to complement the first part—statement of research topic, research question, and the Literature Review, but focusing on your overall research design and the methods you plan to use to collect and analyze data. As with the literature review, you should reference sources relevant to your design concerns and decisions.

The draft research design should contain:

- A *brief* (½ to ¾ page) reintroduction of your problem and a clear statement of your hypotheses/questions.
- An overview of your research design, including the methods to be used to investigate the research question with particular attention given to the selection of data gathering methods (why you chose those particular methods and how they are relevant to your research question), and the method of analysis. Be sure to explain why this design suits the problem at hand).
- Your sampling scheme (method of sampling) for your research and where you plan to obtain your data.
- A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of your design and data 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 Research Report.
- Ethical issues connected with your research and discuss how you are going to address them.

Length: approximately five to six pages. We will spend class time during each session to assist in the research design.

Research Portfolio and Presentation: (35%) of course grade

Due date: Final Research Portfolio is due on Monday, May 5 by 6 pm (the last day of classes).

The culminating assignment for this course will be a research portfolio/your final proposal that contains several elements. The first is a proposal submitted as though you were applying for funding from a particular agency. There is no word limitation on this paper, but I will find it difficult to read papers that are too lengthy—recommended length is 18 to 20 pages excluding appendices. The proposal should include elements from all of the previous assignments, including your pilot study--*significant editing and revising as necessary* --is expected.

Overall, your final research proposal/portfolio should include the following elements:

1. **Introduction-**-a basic introduction to the problem you are investigating. Within the conflict that you select for your design, identify the specific problem that your research will address. For example, the problem of your research could focus on learning more about the conflict actors—their beliefs, actions, or opinions about a certain aspect of the conflict. Alternatively, your research could seek to find information about those who are witnesses to the violence or those indirectly affected by the violence, such as children or the elderly.

- 2. Literature review. In conjunction with your problem statement, you will provide a fairly thorough review of the relevant literature and analyze what is known and not known about this problem. For example, if you want to determine the impact of conflict-related violence on eight year-old children, you should address the current literature on this topic. The goal here is to demonstrate your familiarity with the subject and to convince the readers of the necessity for studying the problem. An analysis of the current literature to show a) its strengths and deficiencies and b) the necessity for your research.
- 3. **Purpose of your study**. What exactly is the primary purpose of your investigation; what are you trying to accomplish through your study? The purpose needs to be specific, narrowly focused, small in scope and achievable assuming that you have limited resources. Do not select a broad purpose, such as the cause of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, since there is no single cause and no single conflict.
- 4. **Research question or hypothesis** that guides your investigation, including definitions of major concepts that you are using. Include an account of what related questions will not be addressed in your study.
- 5. **Methodology.** In this section you develop the methodology that you plan to deploy. The central factor here is specificity—what exactly are the data gathering activities/instruments and the data analysis methods.
 - a. For data gathering, you should provide a detailed plan of activities for what you plan to do regarding interviews, surveys, observations, focus groups, content analysis of reports, testimony, for example.
 - b. Regarding data analysis, you can select and develop one of the methods that we have discussed up to this point in the course: case study, ethnology, and grounded theory studies, if you feel that would be best.
- 6. **Conclusions**. 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 but not monetary amounts.
- The pilot study*
- Human Subjects Review application
- Reflections on yourself as the researcher and the research process.

<u>*What is a pilot Study?</u> A pilot is a kind of initial run of the planned research, like a small-scale experiment of the real thing, a segment of research activities. In other words, pilot study is the operationalization" of a part of the research design by actually studying a very small scale version of it, not just to acquire experience in data generation, collection, processing and analysis, but also to explore the viability (*"do-ability"*) of the more comprehensive research design. For example, if one's (a) *research design* calls for interviewing Palestinians and Israelis about the prospects for "positive peace" in the Middle East, rather than interview hundreds of members of each "identity group," as might be called for in a funded, "statistically representative" version of the project, for the (b) *pilot study* the student might go to the Johnson Center on the main GMU campus, locate five

Palestinian and five Israeli/Jewish GMU students and interview them. Again, the objective of the *pilot study* is to get students to actually *apply* some of the ideas and techniques they would otherwise only read and hear about in class; i.e., to go beyond their research designs *and*, on a small scale, actually conduct systematic research into complex conflicts and their constructive handling.

- a) There are many kinds of pilots.
 - Some pilots focus on gathering data, for example (1) writing and then testing a questionnaire that you plan to use for sampling a group of people;
 (2) writing and then testing questions planned for interviews; (3) finding information through various search engines that is critical for your research, such as appearing in public media.
 - Other pilots focus on the method of analysis that you plan, on a small scale. If you intend to use ethnographic analysis, then your pilot could include an analysis of one interview with someone. The same goes for any other method of analysis planned.
- b) Structure of pilot study: (a) A description of the pilot research you conducted; (b) a summary of what you tested, such as a portion of the data that you gathered or that you analyzed; (c) how you did it (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, and/or document collection protocols), what you learned, and how it has affected your research design (confirming it, requiring modifications, etc.); (d) the results (analysis) of your pilot study, specifying what went wrong or what went right about the pilot; and (d) a conclusion specifying whether and how, if at all, you would change your research plan developed earlier.

Initial Class Schedule and Assignments

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

Week 1: January 27, 2014

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

Reading: Robson, C. Real World Research, Chapter 1

To do: Brainstorm ideas and problems in conflict and research (in class)

Week 2: February 3, 2014

Social science research and the multidisciplinary nature of conflict studies. Overview of research approaches: inductive and deductive, qualitative and quantitative, positivists and constructivists.

Reading: Creswell, Chapter 1 Robson, Part One—Chapter 2 Research examples: E. King, "Memory Controversies in Post Genocide Rwanda" and David Mellor, "Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Australia: The Dilemma of Apologies, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation." (online)

To Do: Review both articles. What did you learn from these studies?

Guest speaker: From the Library services

Week 3: February 10, 2014

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

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

Research examples: Mbangu Anicet Muyingi, "African Ethics and the Moral Possibilities of Ubuntu towards Conflict Resolution in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC);" and Ian M. Borton, "Effects of Race, Sex, and Victims' Reasons for Victim- Offender Dialogue;" (online) Also Paul Wehr. "Conflict Mapping" at http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/cmap.htm

To do: Initial Problem Identification, before class. Your first assignment will be to draft one page (200-500 words) detailing a problem in conflict resolution that you feel needs to be addressed with a research project. 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 4: February 17, 2014

Designing the inquiry overview. Fixed and flexible designs. Peer discussion of concept maps/problem draft, literature searches.

Reading: Creswell, Chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7 Robson: Chapter 4 Yin, Chapters 1 & 2 (Introduction, Designing Case Studies)

Research example: Tal Litvak-Hirsch; Dan Bar-On; Julia Chaitin, "Whose House is This? Dilemmas of Identity Construction in the Israeli-Palestinian Context" and Veale & Stavrou, "*Former Lord's Resistance Army Child Abductees*" (online)

To do: Concept mapping in class for literature review (including peer review).

Week 5: February 24, 2014

Planning Research using Fixed Designs. Thinking with numbers and structure. Design focus: Experiments and Surveys. Operationalization of concepts.

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Reading: Creswell, pp. 129-132, 173-202 Robson, Chapter 5 Research examples: Johnson, David W; Johnson, Roger; Dudley, Bruce; Mitchell, James; Fredrickson, Joel, "The impact of conflict resolution training on middle school students." (Experimental design); and Kapanake & Mullet, "Judging the Acceptability of Amnesties: A Togolese Perspective" (Quasi-experiment); and Robb Willer & Nick Adams, "The threat of terrorism and support for the 2008 presidential candidates: results of a national field experiment"

To do: Literature review & problem statement due.

Week 6: March 3, 2014

Planning Research using Flexible Designs: Case Studies and Grounded Theory.

Reading: Creswell, *Qualitative Research Questions & Qualitative Procedures* (pp. 129-132, 173-202 in 3rd edition) Robson, Chapter 6

Research examples: Mary Allen, "Violence and voice: using a feminist constructivist grounded theory to explore women's resistance to abuse." (Grounded Theory).

To do: Online quiz will be available next week.

Week 7: March 10-March 16, 2014 SPRING BREAK

Week 8: March 17, 2014

Research design continued: Design focus: Action and Evaluation research.

Reading: Robson, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 Seidman, Chapter 2 Yin, Chapter 3

Research examples: Reading: Mixed Method Designs: A Review of Strategies for Blending Quantitative and Qualitative Methodologies. Kathryn Pole. https://www.academia.edu/603360/Mixed_Method_Designs_A_Review_of_Strategies_f or_Blending_Quantitative_and_Qualitative_Methodologies and, Ross, Marc Howard. Action Evaluation in the Theory and Practice of Conflict Resolution at <u>http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/pcs/Ross81PCS.htm_and,</u> Wayne, Ellen. (2008) "*Is it just talk?Understanding and Evaluating Intergroup Dialogue.*"

Week 9: March 24, 2014

Data collection: Interviews and Observations. Primary and secondary sources. Operationalizing concepts and writing questions. Issues of access, trust, emphathy.

Reading: Robson, Part III, Chapters 11 and 13 Seidman, Interviewing as Qualitative Research, Chapters 1, 4, 6 and 7 Research examples: Kaomea, "Dilemmas of an Indigenous Academic: A Native Hawaiian Story," and Anuradha Chakravarty "Partially Trusting" Field Relationships Opportunities and Constraints of Fieldwork in Rwanda's Postconflict Setting," and Ferguson, Binks, et al. The IRA Apology of 2002 and Forgiveness in Northern Ireland's Troubles: A Cross-National Study of Printed Media (online)

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

Week 10: March 31, 2014

Data collection continued. Surveys, Questionnaires and archival data. Validity. Primary and secondary sources. Operationalizing concepts part two (writing questions, sampling schemes).

Reading: Robson, Chapters 10, 12, 14 Yin, Case Study Research, Chapter 4

Research examples: Bleich, et.al. 'Emotional Impact of Exposure to Terrorism among Young-Old and Old-Old Israeli Citizens," and Audrey R. Chapman "Truth Commissions and Intergroup Forgiveness: The Case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," and Debra Kaminer, "Exploratory Research Report: Forgiveness Attitudes of Truth Commission Deponents: Relation to Commission Response During Testimony."

To do: Final draft research design due.

Week 11: April 7, 2014

Research ethics and principles. Standards of quality.

Reading: Robson, Chapters 9 Creswell, review Chapter 4 on Ethical Considerations

Research examples: Stephanie J. Bird, "Responsible Research: What is Expected? Commentary on: "Statistical Power, the Belmont Report, and the Ethics of Clinical Trials" and "ethical dilemmas handout."

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

Week 12: April 14, 2014

Analyzing Qualitative Data. Representation, authenticity.

Reading: Robson, Chapter 17 and Part IV Creswell, Chapter 9 See also Seidman and Yin relevant chapters.

Research examples: Inger Skjelsbaek, "Therapeutic Work with victims of Sexual Violence," and Javier Martı'n-Pen[°]a & Susan Opotow. "The Legitimization of Political Violence: A Case Study of ETA in the Basque Country."

To do: Peer review of instruments for pilot, continued.

Week 13: April 21, 2014

Analyzing Quantitative Data.

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

Research examples: Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy, Les Roberts, "Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey," and Kelly, Caroline and John Kelly (1994). "Who gets involved in collective action? Social psychological determinants of individual participation in trade unions," and Ibrahim Kira, "The Effects of Torture."

To Do: Pilot. Presentations begin (10-15 minutes per person).

Week 14: April 28, 2014

Issues in conflict analysis and resolution research revisited: Violence and safety in the field.

Reading: Robson, Chapter 18 Yin, Chapter 6

Research example: Dale Bagshaw, et.al., "Conducting Research in the Middle East's Conflict Zone, International Research Collaboration: Building Teams and Managing Conflicts."

To Do: Presentations continued.

Week 15: May 5, 2014

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

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To do: <u>Research Portfolio due by 6:00 p.m.</u>