

## **CONF 320, Interpersonal Conflict Analysis and Resolution**

Tuesdays/Thursdays, 3:00-4:15

Robinson Hall, Room 243A

Instructor, Stacy Stryjewski; email:sstryje1@gmu.edu; (703) 993-4165

Office hours by appointment

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course explores a variety of theories and frameworks for analyzing and resolving interpersonal conflict. We will examine theory in relation to interpersonal conflict, beginning with theories framing individual development, family relations, and social experiences early in life. Students will examine the various dimensions of one's self and social interaction that lead to interpersonal conflict situations. Students will have an opportunity to consider the range of possible interpersonal conflicts, the possible associated causes, and methods of inquiry that lead to resolution. Through analysis, exercises, and role plays, students will reflect on "who am I and what do I bring to this particular conflict?" and further, "what are my range of options to begin the resolution process?"

A personal skills contract developed in the first week of class will highlight strengths that students bring in handling interpersonal conflict, areas they would like to improve, and approaches they would like to experiment with in class exercises. Reflection is encouraged at both the individual level and the group (class) level to further develop skills.

### **COURSE MATERIALS**

Required texts (available in the GMU bookstore):

Stone, Douglas, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen. Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most. New York: Viking, 1999.

Tavris, Carol and Elliot Aronson. Mistakes Were Made (but not by me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2007.

\*\* Additional required readings will be posted on the class web page on E-Reserve.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

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#### **Participation**

**15 %**

Because much of this course involves in-class, experiential learning, participation is a significant course grade. Course attendance is expected and is part of your participation grade. *Just showing up for class does not represent 'A' participation work.* Students are expected to complete their reading assignments on time and to participate in class discussions and exercises.

#### **Skills Contract Journal**

**20 %**

At the beginning of the course, students will be asked to develop a skills contract journal that highlights strengths they bring to the course, skills they would like to improve, and areas of

interpersonal communication they would like to have an opportunity to practice in class. Students will self-evaluate their progress at the end of the course.

**Mid-term Exam**

**20 %**

The mid-term exam will be an in-class, open-book exam containing interpersonal conflict scenarios that students will consider for each question.

**Team Presentation**

**20%**

Students will partner with three of their peers to prepare a team presentation. The goal of the assignment is to review an interpersonal conflict scenario from a film or book and present an analysis and recommendations for possible resolution or prevention of the conflict. Presentations will be presented throughout the semester (sign up sheet will be distributed) and should last approximately 15-20 minutes.

**Final Exam**

**25 %**

The written exam for this course will be an open-book, take home essay exam. The exam will be distributed May 5th and will be due May 11th no later than 8 p.m.

\*\*\*\*Cell phones and Computers: As a courtesy to all, please keep cell phones OFF during class. Use of computers is not permitted as this course is experiential, requires full participation and class slides are provided for notes. Thanks for your cooperation.

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**Class Topics and Readings**

- 1/22 Introduction to Course/Syllabus Review/Discussion: What does conflict resolution look like?  
Readings: Tavis, Intro, pp. 1-10; Stone, Intro, pp. -20;
- 1/24 Basic Human Needs in the Interpersonal Realm  
Readings: Sites, Paul. "Needs as Analogues to Emotions" Conflict: Human Needs Theory. Ed. John Burton. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990. 7-33. (e-reserve)
- 1/29 NO CLASS—CLIMATE CHANGE FORUM
- 1/31 The Nature/Nurture Debate  
Skills Contract Due/Group Assignments (Sign Up Sheet)  
Readings: Stone, pp. 25-57
- 2/5 Personality and Self Development/Individual Characteristics Theories (exercise)  
Readings: Tavis, Ch 1 pp. 11-39;
- 2/07 The Development of Social Interaction  
Links between Early Social Experiences and Later Social Relations  
Readings: Tavis, Ch 3 pp. 68-96
- 2/12 Cognition and Social Behavior; Attitudes and Emotions (Role Play)  
Readings: Stone pp.58-82

- 2/14 Mistakes, Face-Saving, and Self-Justification  
Readings: Folger, Joseph P., Marshall Scott Poole and Randall K. Stutman, "Face-Saving" Working Through Conflict. New York: Longman, Inc., 2001. 155-184. (e-reserve)
- 2/19 Family Structure,  
Readings: Stone: pp.85-128
- 2/21 Family cont. (exercise)
- 2/26 Gender Roles, Marriage  
Readings: Tavis, Ch 6 pp. 158-184
- 2/28 Perceiving and Understanding People/Attribution Theory (Role Play)  
Readings: Tavis, Ch. 2 pp. 40-67
- 3/4 Stereotypes, Prejudices, Categories/Positioning Theory  
Readings: Tavis, Ch 5, pp. 127-157
- 03/06 **MIDTERM EXAM**—In class, open book
- 03/11 AND 13 NO CLASS—ENJOY SPRING BREAK
- 03/18 Language and Communication/Dialogue, Debate  
Readings: Stone, pp. 147-184;
- 03/20 Language cont. (exercise)  
Readings: Tannen, Deborah. "Asymmetries: Women and Men Talking at Cross-purposes" You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation. New York: Ballantine Books, 1990. 49-73. (e-reserve)
- 03/25 Bullying, Gangs, and Aggression  
Chesler, Phyllis. "Indirect Aggression among Girls and Teenagers" Woman's Inhumanity to Woman. New York: The Penguin Group, 2001. 78-123. (e-reserve)
- 03/27 Role Plays Revisited/Class Time to Prepare for Presentations  
Readings: Tavis, Ch. 7 pp. 185-212;
- 04/01 Class Presentations/Discussion
- 04/03 Class Presentations/Discussion
- 04/08 Leadership Styles and Conflict  
Avolio, Bruce J. and Bernard M. Bass, "Colin Powell's Thoughts on Leadership" and "Leading Ladies" Developing Potential across a Full Range of Leadership. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002. 16-19, 62-65. (e-reserve)

- 04/10 Leadership Cont.  
Readings: Wilmot, William W. and Joyce L. Hocker. "Moderating Your Conflicts."  
Interpersonal Conflict, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007, 210-242 (e-reserve)
- 04/15 Class Presentations and Discussion
- 04/17 Decision-Making—Crucial Decisions: Self-Serving and Emotive Rules  
Readings: Stone, pp. 201-234
- 04/22 Decision-Making (Exercise)
- 04/24 Role Plays Revisited
- 05/01 Modernization and Technology  
The Impact of the Internet on Interpersonal Relationships  
Predicting Behavior—Are Personality Typing Tools (e.g. Enneagram, MBTI) Useful  
in Preventing Conflict?
- 05/05 Review: Assessing Interpersonal Conflicts, Theory and Approaches to Resolution  
Readings: Tavris; Ch. 8 pp.213-235  
Final Exam Distributed
- 05/07 Reading Day
- 05/11 **FINAL EXAMS DUE**

## **ACADEMIC POLICIES AND INFORMATION**

### **Academic Honesty and Collaboration**

George Mason University has an Honor Code with guidelines regarding academic integrity and which is designed, "to promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community" ([www.gmu.edu/catalog/policies](http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/policies)). The Honor Code lays out strict penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

Plagiarism is a serious offense, and all written work for this course should include proper citations in a standard citation format (MLA, APA, etc.). *If you are unsure about how to cite a direct quotation or concept from course or outside readings, then ask for help.* "I wasn't sure how to cite a source, so I left out the reference," is not an acceptable defense for plagiarism. Copies of common style manuals are available at the GMU library reference desk.

For individual class assignments, you may discuss your ideas with others or ask for feedback; however, you are responsible for making certain that there is no question that the work you hand in is your own. You may not submit papers or presentations from other courses to fulfill assignments for this class.

For group class assignments, the names of all participants should appear on the work. While it's fine for groups to divide project work among team members, the final product that's

submitted should represent a single, conceptually-linked piece of work. With rare exception, each student working in a group is given the same grade for an assignment. *If a group is having trouble with a member not fulfilling their work obligation, then the group needs to bring the problem to the instructor's attention immediately.*

### **Late Work**

Class assignments that are submitted late will be penalized by one letter grade for each day they are late. If a student has a documented emergency, special arrangements can be made with the instructor.

### **Paper Format**

Papers for the course should be typed, double-spaced, have 1" margins, and use a common 12-point font. The pages should be numbered and stapled together. Papers should have a title, include your name and the instructor's name, and consistently follow a single standard academic citation format (MLA, APA, etc.).

## **STUDENT RESOURCES**

### **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>).

### **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.

"George Mason University is committed to providing appropriate services and accommodations that allow self-identified 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>).