

CONF 330: 003 Community, Group, and Organizational Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Spring 2011: Thursdays, 10:30 am — 1:15 pm

Sci Tech II 019

Online: courses.gmu.edu

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 1:30 to 3:30, Robinson Hall B 365

Course Overview

This course examines conflict within social structures at the group, organizational and community levels, including governmental, cultural, religious, social and civic groups. The course emphasizes theories of conflict, provides frameworks to analyze conflict, and explores methods for resolving conflict within social organizations.

Groups, organizations and communities are powerful entities that shape the ways we think about ourselves, the ways we see others, and how others see us. These entities are distinguished by interdependence—embedded, enduring patterns of interaction, mutual need and expectations.

In this course we will consider the intersection and dynamics between human conflict and group, organizational and community behavior and how conflicts might be mitigated and resolved. We will consider implications of the social construction of group relations, including the ways language and structures both shape and reflect our attitudes, behaviors, expectations and norms. Themes of power, relationships, authority, change, social capital, leadership, and justice will be threaded through our conversations. We will examine our own and others' relationships to organizations and communities at the micro, meso, and macro levels using frameworks for individual, situational, identity, cultural and structural analysis.

We will work together to develop a theoretical and practical understanding of conflict in groups, organizations and communities, as well as strategies for conflict prevention and intervention. Through readings, class discussions, current events, films, case studies, and a simulation of a real-world conflict, you will develop the ability to analyze social group conflicts, envision healthy social relations, and consider possible intervention designs.

Course Requirements

Participation (20%)

Regular attendance and consistent engagement in class discussions is expected. It is critical to complete the assigned readings prior to each class in order to learn the subject matter and to be

prepared to fully engage in discussions and in-class exercises. Two assignments in particular are important contributions to the course:

1. During the semester, we will discuss current social group conflicts and apply concepts, theories, and frameworks we have learned in class to these conflicts. To generate these discussions, each student is responsible for sharing an example of one such conflict during the semester and framing the discussion. Appropriate examples will come from recent newspaper or magazine articles, or from a radio or television news story. (5%)
2. During this course we will conduct a simulation of a community/group/organizational conflict in which each member of the class will assume a role. Full participation in the simulation is essential to the participation grade. (10%)

Case Study Analysis and Reflection Papers (50%)

To gain experience applying your theoretical and practical skills to real-life conflicts, you will select a community, group, or organization to study throughout the semester. The purpose of this assignment is to identify conflict and/or conflict prevention within the entity you've selected, and to engage in analysis and critical thinking, while applying concepts, theories, and models from class readings. You will write five short papers throughout the semester, each worth 10%. You may opt to rewrite one submitted paper for re-evaluation (by April 28). A detailed description of this assignment and topics for each paper will be available on Blackboard.

There are two options for selecting a group, community, or organization to study:

- 1) Identify a group to study during the semester, or observe a group or organization to which you already belong. This may be any type of special-interest group (e.g. book or film club, study group), organization (e.g. your workplace), or community-based group (e.g. neighborhood association). Whatever you select, it must be a group with which you will have weekly contact.
- 2) Study a current community conflict. While it is not necessary that the conflict is one in which you are involved, you will need to follow it closely throughout the semester; thus, it will be important to keep in mind the ease with which you can access new and relevant information as the semester progresses.

Reflection papers are due at the beginning of the class periods on *February 17, March 3, March 24, April 7, and April 28*. The papers should be submitted through Blackboard (an assignment will be created for each paper) or in class in hard copy. A partial letter grade will be deducted for each day a paper is late, no papers will be accepted after 5 days from the original deadline.

Final Exam (30%)

The final exam will be a take-home essay and short answer examination. You will receive the exam in class on May 5 and will have one week to complete it. It is due no later than May 12 at 5:00 p.m., submitted online. No late exams will be accepted except in extreme circumstances with the approval of the instructor.

Extra Credit Policy

Opportunities for extra credit may be offered during the semester, at the instructor's discretion. Such opportunities are available to students who have completed all required assignments and are passing the course. Due dates and other requirements for extra credit assignments will be provided on a case-by-case basis.

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 a copy of the Honor Code at academicintegrity.gmu.edu. 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.

The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution 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. ICAR's policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace or substitute for it.

Student Resources

GMU Writing Center, <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

“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.”

Disability Support Services, <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/advising/dss.html>

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.”

Library Services

The undergraduate Conflict Analysis and Resolution library liaison is Melissa Johnson (703.993.2212). Do not hesitate to contact her with specific questions about holdings and research in these areas or whom to contact for materials available across the Mason Campuses.

Course Reading and Resources

Blackboard

This course will utilize Blackboard to house documents pertinent to the course, to submit assignments, and to provide a space for discussion and collaboration. Students are expected to check the site regularly. Instructions for access will be provided the first day of class.

E-Reserves

Readings for this course are available through the university’s electronic reserves system.

To access e-reserves:

1. Go to <http://oscr.gmu.edu>
2. Click on the green box “e-reserves”
3. Using the drop-down boxes, select the course (CONF 330-003) and instructor (Schoeny)
4. Enter the password (To be announced) and click “submit” to view items. It is case sensitive.

Textbook

Brubaker, David R. and Ruth Hoover Zimmerman (2009) *The Little Book of Healthy Organizations: Tools for Understanding and Transforming Your Organization*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

INTRODUCTION

January 27th: Introduction to the course

- Welcome and introductions
- Review syllabus
- Develop discussion guidelines and other class protocol
- Self and conflict

Reading to be completed for class:

- Cheldelin and Lucas, pages 13-24

GROUPS, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

February 3rd: Interdependence and social ties

- Small group exercise: Find themes in lifelines
- Current events: civility, discourse and waging conflict
- Identify group or organization for case study

Reading to be completed for class:

- Putnam, Bowling Alone
- Naomi Shihab Nye, Gate A-4, <http://www.peaceworkmagazine.org/print/917/>
- Michael Gerson, The two paths to civility, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/20/AR2011012003593.html>

Assignments to be completed for class:

- Select a group, organization or community for case study reflection papers
- Create a brief “lifeline” of important groups, organizations, and communities in your life.

February 10th: Conflict emergence and dynamics (Level One Analysis)

- Overview of group formation and group dynamics
- Positive and negative aspects of conflict
- Current events: (2 volunteers)
- Film: TBA

Readings to be completed for class:

- D’Estree, pages 68-87
- Baron and Kerr, pages 1-19
- Lewis Coser, pages 33-38.
- Robert Frost, Mending Wall, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=173530>

Assignments to be completed for class: Post your focus for the case study (online)

February 17th: Overview of conflict, structure and systems

- Intergroup conflict
- Power, norms and authority in conflict
- Discussion of initial observations and reflections from case studies
- Film continued...
- Current events: (3 volunteers)

Readings to be completed for class:

- Dukes, Unspoken expectations and rules of engagement, pp. 17-37
- Rubenstein, Institutions, pp. 195-213
- Folger, Poole and Stutman, Power, pp. 104-144

Assignment to be completed for class: First case study reflection paper due

February 24th: Dynamics of difference

- The role of culture in social conflicts
- Diversity and multiculturalism from global to local
- Current events:
- Film: TBA

Readings to be completed for class:

- Mor-Barak, pages 121-145
- Gadlin, pages 33-47
- http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/culture_conflict/?nid=1186

Assignment to be completed for class:

March 3rd: Working through conflict: Analysis and Action

- Models: Nested model of conflict/envisioning process, narrative analysis and positioning theory, taproots and triggers
- Exercise: Application of models to student cases
- Current events:
- Discussion of observations and reflections from case studies

Readings to be completed for class:

- Dugan, pages 365-372
- Harre and Slocum, pages 100-118
- Warfield, pages 169-174
- Schoeny, Community dialogue and engagement: Two Cases. 5 pp.

Assignment to be completed for class: Second case study reflection paper due

March 10th: Simulation Introduction (Class location to be announced)

- Groups formed for background research, begin online research
- Roleplay guidelines
- Discussion of conflict context, dynamics, and stories
- Current events:

Readings to be completed for class: (to be posted)

- Background on West Virginia Case Study: Coal Mines, Communities and Conflict
- Roles

March 17th: Spring Break

March 24th: Simulation

- Full class simulation and debrief

Readings to be completed for class:

- Review assigned role and posted supplemental material available online before class.

Assignment to be completed for class: Third case study reflection paper due

March 31st: Simulation

- Simulation and debrief continues
- Decision on TBD/emerging intervention topics for final classes
- Current events:

Readings to be completed for class:

- Botes, Informal Roles, pp. 270-279

INTERVENTIONS FOR GROUP, COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

April 7th: Matching conflict assessment to intervention

- Four sectors: Addressing disputes, Increasing understanding, Creating collaboration, and Healing the past.
- Current events:
- Discussion of observations and reflections on case studies

Readings to be completed for class:

- Dukes, et al Too Big? Pp. 131-154
- Mayer, Engagement pp 181-214
- TBA

Assignment to be completed for class: Fourth case study reflection paper due
April 14th: Working through conflict—Organizations addressing disputes

- Models and stories of organizational conflict
- (Invited) Guest lecturer: Samantha Levine-Finley, ICAR MS, Associate Ombudsman, National Institutes of Health Center for Cooperative Resolution/Office of the Ombudsman

Readings to be completed for class:

- Cloke and Goldsmith, pages 124-129
- Constantino and Merchant, Recognizing conflict management as a system, pages 19-32
- Carter and Byrnes, Recognizing types of conflict, pages 27-44
- Brubaker and Zimmerman, pages 7-84

April 21st: Working through conflict: Creating collaboration

- Focus on shared decision-making and public participation
- Other forms of action? (TBD)
- Current events:
- Discussion of observations and reflections of case studies

Readings to be completed for class:

- Dukes, The challenge for a transformative practice, pp. 121-139
- Selection from Managing Public Disputes, TBD

April 28th: Working through conflict—Increasing understanding

- Forms of dialogue
- Dialogue applications in schools, organizations and communities...and critiques
- Healing and restorative justice
- Guest: Restorative Justice Project

Readings to be completed for class:

- Abramson and Moore, Community Conferencing, pages 123-139
- Dialogue readings TBD

Assignment to be completed for class: Fifth case study reflection paper due

May 5th: Last Class

- Current events:
- Concept mapping
- Course evaluations

May 12th: Final exam due by 5:00 p.m.