

CONF 210 – Section 002: Theories of Conflict And Conflict Resolution

Instructor: Michael D. English
Location: Innovation Hall 206
Schedule: Mondays and Wednesdays, 17:55 – 19:10

Office Hours: By request
Contact: menglis1@gmu.edu

"I have laboured carefully, not to mock, lament, or execrate, but to understand human actions." Benedict De Spinoza, Tractatus Politicus, Chapter 1

Overview

This course is designed to introduce students to a range of theories dealing with the sources of violent conflict and the potential for conflict resolution. Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CAR) is a growing field of inquiry and knowledge production. CAR is constructed from a range of disciplines and sub-fields and as a result, students must learn to navigate this new terrain which pulls its theoretical insights from a number of intersecting areas of study, such as history, psychology, anthropology, and sociology to name but a few. Part of our mission in this course is to explore why theory is important and how theory helps us understand the emergence of violent conflict. To achieve this, we will spend our time evaluating theory and applying it to real world cases. Students will learn core CAR theories to help them think critically about contemporary social problems and how conflict resolution offers an alternative to the use of further violence to address these problems.

Delivery

Content for this course will be delivered in a hybrid lecture and seminar format. Students are expected to show up on time with the day's readings completed prior to the start of the session and to participate in the class discussion and activities. The instructor is expected to work with the students to make sure they understand the assigned readings and to adjust the course format and syllabus accordingly.

Grading and Assignments (Assignment details provided in separate handouts)

Conflict Theory Journal (14 entries, 250-400 words each) 30%

- 7 entries due by 10/14
- 7 entries due by 12/14

Midterm Exam (1000 words) 20%

- Midterm is due 10/14

Final Paper (2000-2500 words) 30%

- Final is due 12/14

Reading Quizzes and Participation 20%

- Reading quizzes 10%
- Participation 10%

Final grades are determined based on the total number of points obtained on the above.

- A = 100–90
- B = 89–80
- C = 79–70
- D = 69–65
- F = 64–0

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Required Materials

You have one required text for this course. Please purchase or rent either through the University Bookstore or a place of your choice in either hardback or e-format. Just make sure you get the 2012 edition. Other materials are hyperlinked in the syllabus.

Mayer, B. S. (2012). *The Dynamics of Conflict: A guide to engagement and intervention*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Attendance and Tardiness Policy

Students are allowed two absences over the semester without impact to their grade. Use them wisely. Do not be late to class. Two late arrivals equal one class absence.

Late Submission of Work

Late work will be penalized 50% prior to marking if not approved in advance by the instructor, accompanied by a doctor's note, or with proof of family related emergency.

Library Services

The CAR library liaison is Mary Oberlies (moberlie@gmu.edu). Do not hesitate to contact her with specific questions about library resources and research related materials.

Honor Code

A note on the Honor Code. 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.

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.

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

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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>).

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Schedule of Readings by Week – (Follow hyperlinks. You will need to access some of these articles using Mason Libraries. Please see a librarian if you have problems).

08/25 – Introduction

08/27 – Writing for conflict studies and making a logical argument

Reading – Bertolt Brecht, “Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties”

09/01 – No Class – Labor Day

09/03 – The Sociological Imagination

Readings – C. Wright Mills “The Promise”

09/08 – What is theory, why do we need theory, and how do we begin to theorize?

Reading – bell hooks, “The Significance of Theory”

09/10 – Theorizing the violence of everyday life

Readings – Vandana Shiva, “Our Violent Economy is Hurting Women” AND Joe Sacco, “Not in my country”

09/15 – The Individual

Reading – Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, read pages 01-18

09/17 – The Individual

Reading – Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, read pages 19-40

09/22 – The Individual

Reading – Derrick Jensen, “Beyond Hope”

09/24 – The Collective

Reading – Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, pages 01-27

09/29 – The Collective

Reading – Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, pages 28-68

10/01 – The Collective

Reading – Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam”

10/06 – The State

Reading – John Mearsheimer, “Structural Realism”

10/08 – The State

Reading – Margaret Thatcher, “Speech at Kensington Town Hall”

10/13 – Columbus Day (No class – Use time off to write Midterm)

10/15 – Discussion of Midterm Experience / Introduction to Judith Butler

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10/20 – Precarity

Reading – Judith Butler, “Precarious Life, Grievable Life”

10/22 – Precarity

Reading – Judith Butler, “Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect.”

10/27 – Human Needs, Social Identity, and Conflict

Reading – Bernard Mayer, *Dynamics of Conflict* Preface, Ch. 1, and Ch. 2

10/29 – Human Needs, Social Identity, and Conflict

Reading – Bernard Mayer, *Dynamics of Conflict* Preface, Ch. 1, and Ch. 2

11/03 – Power, Culture, and Conflict

Reading – Bernard Mayer, *Dynamics of Conflict* Ch. 3 and Ch. 4

11/05 – Power, Culture, and Conflict

Reading – Bernard Mayer, *Dynamics of Conflict* Ch. 3 and Ch. 4

11/10 – Conflict Resolution

Reading – Bernard Mayer, *Dynamics of Conflict* Ch. 5, Ch. 6, and Ch. 7

11/12 – Conflict Resolution

Reading – Bernard Mayer, *Dynamics of Conflict* Ch. 5, Ch. 6, and Ch. 7

11/17 – Conflict Resolution

Reading – Bernard Mayer, *Dynamics of Conflict* Ch. 8,9,10, 11, and 12

11/19 – Conflict Resolution

Reading – Bernard Mayer, *Dynamics of Conflict* Ch. 8,9,10, 11, and 12

11/24 – Conflict Resolution and Indigenous Practices

Reading – Polly O. Walker, “Decolonizing Conflict Resolution: Addressing the Ontological Violence of Westernization”

11/26 – No Class – Thanksgiving

12/01 – Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

Reading – Vivienne Jabri, “Peacebuilding, the local and the international: a colonial or a postcolonial rationality?”

12/03 – Critical Conflict Resolution

Reading – Michael D. English and Derek Sweetman, “Critical Conflict Resolution: Notes on its development and key concepts”

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Bibliography

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