

**CONF 301**  
**Research and Inquiry in Conflict Studies**  
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution  
College of Arts and Sciences  
George Mason University  
Fall 2005

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Office hours: Tuesdays 2:30 – 4:30, or by appt.

Course time and location: Enterprise Hall 274, Tuesdays, 4:30 – 7:10PM,

**INTRODUCTION:**

This is the foundational research and methods course for undergraduate students in the joint program in Conflict Analysis & Resolution. To say it is foundational is also partly to indicate its goals and structure. The course is intended to give students the tools with which to *think* about social phenomena—like conflict—as potential topics for research, *design* an appropriate research strategy in light of the social phenomena in question, *implement* said research strategy, and, finally, take steps to *write about* the results of a research project. Students will also learn to approach research projects on conflict collaboratively by working in assigned groups. The overarching goal will be for students to learn to analyze the relevant concepts and, eventually, be able to design and implement a research project independently, critically, and, of course, successfully.

To do this the course will be divided into four parts:

Part I: The Idea of Social Research

Students will learn to think critically about the various epistemological and ontological issues that frame any analysis of social (and other) phenomena. The goal here is for students to achieve a good grasp of the debates, problems, and solutions so they are able to think flexibly about possible social research.

Part II: The Practice of Social Research

This part of the course—the most extensive—will first act as a bridge between the philosophy of science and a consideration of actual social research. We will study “methodology,” or the “science” of research methods or techniques. Another way of describing methodology is the set of justifications or reasons for choosing a certain set of methods, and not others, given a certain type of social phenomenon.

Then we will consider actual methods or techniques—“qualitative,” “quantitative,” and “mixed”—for studying social phenomena. We will move from a consideration of which methods to use to a discussion of how to actually use them. Finally, we will spend some time thinking about a range of problems commonly encountered during the implementation phase of social research: unintended consequences, ethical issues, activism and personal engagement, the responsibility (or even duty) of those doing social research, especially on conflicts, and so on.

### Part III: Writing Social Research

For this section we will read and think about how to write about the results of research and the research process itself. Students will do this in part by presenting a critical overview to their own research projects (see below).

### Part IV: Presenting Social Research

During the final part of the course, research working groups will make presentations about their pilot research projects in order to develop the skills necessary to make public presentation of research findings, and learn how to respond to collaborative assessment.

### **BOOKS (required):**

1. Punch, Kevin, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, Sage Publications, 1998.
2. Starr, June, and Mark Goodale, eds., *Practicing Ethnography in Law: New Dialogues, Enduring Methods*, Palgrave/St. Martin's Press, 2002.
3. Bourgois, Philippe, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

### **OTHER COURSE MATERIALS:**

TBA and distributed, either in class or through the electronic reserve system.

### **COURSE FORMAT:**

This course will feature a combination of lectures, student-presentation of readings, and discussion. Students will be expected to come to each class fully prepared to discuss the readings and otherwise participate in class activities. Because the class meets once a week for 2 ½ hours, we will take a 15-minute break at the halfway mark.

### **EVALUATION:**

1. Mid-term exam: The midterm will be an in-class essay exam in which students will have the full class period to give an answer from among 3-4 questions. This will account for 25% of your final grade. The midterm will be on **October 18** and midterm progress reports will be issued soon after.

2. Final project: This will be both a theoretical and practical exercise. It will consist of two components, both of which will combine to account for 50% of the final grade.

A. Written report: students will write a 13-15-page, double-spaced paper that describes the *what, why, how, and so what* dimensions of a small and feasible research project on some aspect of conflict, one that can be conceptualized, planned, implemented, and reflected upon, during the course of the semester. These papers will be due on **December 15**.

B. Working group presentation: students will be assigned to 4/5-person working groups before the second class. These groups will meet regularly during the semester to discuss general issues of epistemology and research design and to assist individual members within the group as they move forward with their research projects. Besides meeting during the semester, each group will participate in a research workshop that will be held between November 22 and December 6. Over the course of three class periods, each group will give an oral presentation to the rest of the group that does two things: (1) gives an overview of the issues the working group discussed and resolved over the course of the semester; and (2) gives the rest of the class an idea of each person's own research project. After the group presentation, there will be time for comment and evaluation so that students can revise and finalize their research projects and reports.

3. Points for Discussion: Beginning in the second week of class, students will be assigned to 2/3-person discussion teams. They will have the responsibility for preparing "points for discussion" for the rest of the class. These should be distributed via email before our Thursday afternoon class. During the second part of each class, the discussion teams will introduce the points and participate with the professor in facilitating a discussion about them. This will be worth 15% of the final grade.

4. Participation: Because this is a course that will involve lecture as well as discussion, active participation is vital to its success. Even if students will be reading and thinking about certain issues and concepts for the first time, they will be expected to address them critically, substantively, and with an eye toward developing reasoned independent positions. This portion of the class will be worth 10% of the final grade.

\*\* We will discuss class requirements and expectations in detail during our first class meeting.

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### **Introduction to course and course participants**

Tuesday August 30

- Detailed introduction to course, assignments, expectations, participants.

Part I: The Idea of Social Research

September 6

Punch, Ch. 1  
Bourgois, Ch. 1

September 13

Punch, Chapters 2 and 3  
Bourgois, Ch. 2

September 20

Punch, Ch. 4  
Selections from Peter Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science*, on electronic reserve [ER]  
Bourgois, Ch. 3

Part II: The Practice of Social Research

September 27

Punch, Chapters 5 and 8  
Bourgois, Ch. 4

October 4

Punch, Chapters 6 and 7  
Guest lecturer on quantitative methods: To be announced

October 11

NO CLASS

October 18

IN CLASS MIDTERM EXAM

October 25

Punch, Chapters 9 and 10  
Bourgois, Ch. 5

November 1

Chapters 1 (Hirsch) and 3 (Goodale), in Starr and Goodale, eds.  
Bourgois, Ch. 6

November 8

Chapters 6 (Coutin) and 3 (Griffiths), in Starr and Goodale, eds.  
Bourgois, Chapters 7 and 8

Part III: Writing Social Research

November 15

Punch Chapter 12  
Bourgois, Chapter 9 and Epilogues

Part IV: Presenting Social Research

November 22

Research Workshop 1, Groups A and B

November 29

Research Workshop 2, Groups C and D  
COURSE EVALUATIONS

December 6

Research Workshop 3, Groups E and F