

SCHOOL FOR CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND RESOLUTION (S-CAR)
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Conflict Inquiry (CONF 610)

Semester: Fall 2016
Class Time: Thursday, 7:20 - 10:00 pm
Location: Arlington Campus, Founders Hall, Rm. 312
Instructor: Dr. Dennis J.D. Sandole
tel: (703) 250-4996
e-mail: <Dsandole@aol.com>

Course Abstract

This course deals with the *conduct of inquiry* in the multidisciplinary field of conflict analysis and resolution (CAR). Specifically, the course addresses how to discover or generate, collect, process, analyze, and interpret both qualitative and quantitative data on the (a) causes and conditions of conflict -- especially violent conflict -- and (b) optimal approaches to preventing or otherwise responding to protracted conflict at *all* levels.

Operationally, the course addresses how we can **design and conduct conflict research**. The underlying assumption is that we first have to know something about a particular conflict -- we have to first *analyze* it -- before we can attempt to do something about it, such as, *prevent, manage, settle, resolve, and/or transform* it.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

CONF 610 is the **Research Methods** course required of all students enrolled in the Master's Program at GMU's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR). It addresses, therefore, methodologies for the *design and implementation* of research on the **causes** of, and optimal **responses** to *complex, intractable, often violent conflicts* within and between states.

At a fundamental level, the course addresses the following questions embedded in the Philosophy of Science:

. **Ontology:** What is the "nature" of the world about which we try to obtain knowledge? In our case, to what extent are conflicts in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Chechnya, Columbia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), France, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Ivory Coast, Lebanon, Northern Ireland,

Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, U.S., Yemen, Zimbabwe, or elsewhere reflective of *cultural, economic, historical, identity, political, religious, social, and/or other dimensions?*

. **Epistemology:** What constitutes "valid" *knowledge* for any particular conflict system? How do we obtain or determine the "**facts**" about any conflict?

. **Methodology:** How do we conduct research into aspects of *complex conflicts* in order to test existing and/or generate new knowledge about them?

These issues -- *what we perceive, why and how we perceive* -- can impact what we deal with as *conflict researchers*, for example:

- . *Identifying research problems* associated with particular conflict systems;
- . *Selecting research methods* which may be relevant to a better understanding of, *and response to those problems*; as well as
- . Designing particular *interventions* into those conflicts.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Accordingly, the objectives of *Conflict Inquiry* (CONF 610) are to:

- (1) Familiarize students of conflict analysis and resolution (CAR) with what research into complex conflicts is all about;
- (2) Enable students to better understand and utilize the knowledge they uncover in the research-based conflict/conflict resolution literature; and
- (3) Encourage students to undertake research into conflict and conflict resolution themselves, as a basis for preventing, managing, settling, resolving, and/or transforming protracted, violent conflict systems at all levels.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Prerequisites:** Acceptance into S-CAR's MSc. or Ph.D. program and successful completion of either CONF 501 or 801, or permission of

the instructor.

2. **Class Format:** Classes will follow an *interactive seminar format*. Hence, class attendance, participation, and the *completion of relevant readings prior to class* are required.

3. **Assessment:** A *mid-term paper*, worth **40% of the final grade**, will be due on 20 October 2016. A final *research design/pilot study*, representing **50% of the final grade**, will be due on 15 December 2016. *Student participation* will be worth **10% of the final grade**. [Overall in-class participation will determine whether a "borderline" final grade of, for example, B+/A- remains in the B or A category.] Specifically:

(a) For the **midterm paper** (10-15 double-spaced pages), students will consider the implications for the CAR field of the classic statement by the English Romantic poet, Lord Byron, "*Truth like beauty lies in the eye of the beholder.*"

In other words, what does this statement mean in light of our lectures, readings and discussions, for [1] *conflict parties*, [2] *conflict analysts/researchers* and [3] *conflict resolvers*?"

(b) The **final paper** (15-20 double-spaced pages) will be a combined *research design/pilot study* in which:

[1] Each student will craft a *research design* in which they identify and discuss:

[a] *WHAT* she or he **would like to study** for a possible MSc. thesis or other project, if given the chance, time, and other resources;

[b] *WHY* he or she would want to conduct research on that particular problem, spelling out its importance for the CAR field, the community, etc.; and

[c] *HOW* she or he would conduct that research, articulating and discussing the concepts, theories, approaches and research methods relevant to solving the problem implied in the "what." And then:

[2] Each student will conduct a *pilot study*; i.e., "operationalize" 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 overall research design.

For example, if one's *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 would likely be called for in a funded, "statistically representative" version of the project, the student might go to the Johnson Center on the main GMU campus, meet with representatives of appropriate student organizations in order to identify five Palestinian and five Israeli/Jewish GMU students, and then interview them.

Again, the primary objective of the *pilot study* is to provide students with an opportunity 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.

NOTE: Since the mid-term and final papers are meant, among other things, to demonstrate that students have been in the course, the midterm and final papers should contain appropriate references to course concepts and the corresponding readings. For further clarification -- including about the GMU Honor Code (e.g., avoiding any hint of plagiarism) -- students should feel free to consult with the instructor.

(c) **Active Student participation.** In addition to general class participation, students will be given opportunities to lead discussions on the required course readings.

4. Office Hours: Thursdays, immediately following each class and by appointment.

5. Withdrawal: The last day to drop the course *without incurring any tuition penalty* is 6 September 2016. Final drop deadline *with 67% Tuition penalty* is 30 September 2016.

REQUIRED READINGS

(1) Backer, David A., Ravi Bhavnani, and Paul K. Huth (2016). *Peace and Conflict 2016*. London and New York: Routledge.

(2) Brewer, John and Albert Hunter (2006). *Foundations of Multimethod Research: Synthesizing Styles*. Thousand Oaks (California) and London: Sage Publications.

- (3) Creswell, John W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd Edition). Los Angeles and London: SAGE
- (4) Kuhn, Thomas S. (2012). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (50th Anniversary Issue). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (5) Moses, Jonathon W., and Torbjørn L. Knutsen (2007). *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire (UK) and New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- (6) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (1999). *Capturing the Complexity of Conflict: Dealing with Violent Ethnic Conflict in the Post-Cold War Era*. London and New York: Pinter/Cassell [Continuum International].
- (7) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (2002). "Virulent Ethnocentrism: A Major Challenge for Transformational Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in the Post-Cold War Era." *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 4-27. (Go to Google, type in my name and "virulent ethnocentrism" and various sites for the article will appear.)
- (8) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (2007). *Peace and Security in the Postmodern World: The OSCE and Conflict Resolution*. London and New York: Routledge.
- (9) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (2009). "Critical Systemic Inquiry (CSI) in Conflict Analysis and Resolution: The Essential Bridge between Theory and Practice." In *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (Dennis J.D. Sandole, Sean Byrne, Ingrid Sandole-Staroste, and Jessica Senehi, eds.). London and New York: Routledge. (To be provided by instructor.)
- (10) Sriram, Chandra Lekha, John C. King, Julie A. Mertus, Olga Martin-Ortega, and Johanna Herman (2009). *Surviving Field Research: Working in Violent and Difficult Situations*. London and New York: Routledge.
- (11) Wilkinson, Richard and Kate Pickett (2009). *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Press.

COURSE STRUCTURE

1 Sep I. Introduction.

- A. Introductions (including Conflict-Relevant Backgrounds).
- B. Expectations.
- C. Preferred Research Domains.
- D. Course Overview.

8 Sep: NO CLASS

15 Sep/
22 Sep II. The Utility of Systematic Research in Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CAR)

- A. Indicators of Global Conflict-Relevant Trends [Conflict as *Symptoms*].
 - 1. Armed Conflict: *Intrastate* (The "New Wars") and *Interstate*.
 - 2. Genocide.
 - 3. Sexual Violence.
 - 4. Terrorism.
 - 5. Peacebuilding.

READ: Backer, et al., 2016.

- B. Conducting Research on Violent Conflict in the "Real World" as a Participant [Conflict as *Challenged Relationships*].

**READ: Sandole, 2007, Ch. 1.
Sriram, et al., 2009.**

- C. Conducting Research on Violent Conflict in the "Real World" as an Observer [Conflict as Deep-Rooted Causes and Conditions].

**READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 1.
Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009.**

29 Sep/
6 Oct III. Uncovering the Drivers of Violent Conflict.

- A. "Mapping" Potential Causes and Conditions.
 - 1. *3 Levels of Conflict Reality*.
 - 2. *3 Pillar Framework of Conflict and Conflict Resolution (3PF)*.

**READ: Sandole, 2007, Ch. 2;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 6.**

B. *Observer vs. Participant* in Exploring
the Origins and Meaning of Actor Behavior.

1. *Explanation ("Erklären")*: "Action Meaning".
2. *Understanding ("Verstehen")*: "Act Meaning".

READ: Moses and Knutsen, 2007.

How can we, *in this course*, do our own
research to either "explain" or "understand"
conflict phenomena? (**Mnemonic #1: P[PT²DT].**)
And what might be a major confounding
influence on the research process?

13 Oct **IV. Impact on Behavior of Worldviews, Paradigms,
of Disputants, Researchers, Practitioners. (P)**

- A. Normal Science.
B. Anomalies.

1. *Cognitive Blindness.*
2. *Cognitive Resistance.*
3. *Evaluative-Affective Resistance (EAR) 1.*
4. *Evaluative-Affective Resistance (EAR) 2.*

C. Crisis: Breaking the "Paradigmatic Deadlock".

D. Clashing Paradigms: *Realpolitik* ["Hard Power"]
vs. *Idealpolitik* ["Soft Power"].

E. Scientific Revolutions.

**READ: Kuhn, 1996;
Sandole, 1999, pp. 109-113;
Sandole, 2002.**

20 Oct: **MID-TERM PAPERS DUE.**

20 Oct **V. Constructing the Research Design.**

A. Research Design Overview (**Mnemonic #2**).

1. **What?**
2. **Why?**
3. **How?**

B. Problem in Need of Solution: The "**What**" of Research. (P)

1. The General Problem Area.
2. The Specific Problem.
 - (a) Units and Levels of Analysis.
 - (b) Accessibility to Research.
 - (c) Ethical Considerations.

C. Reasons Underlying Selection (Significance of the Problem): The "**Why**" of Research.

1. Theoretical Significance.
2. Practical Significance.

READ: Creswell, 2009, Chs. 1-6;
Review Sandole, 1999, Ch. 1;
Review Sandole, 2007, Ch. 1;
Sandole, 2009 (Provided by Instructor).

27 Oct

D. Researching the Problem: The "**How**" of Research.

1. Type of Study. (T)
 - (a) Exploratory.
 - (b) Descriptive.
 - (c) Causal.
2. Theoretical Setting. (T)
 - (a) Concepts.
 - (b) Hypotheses.
 - (c) Models.
 - (d) Theories.

READ: Creswell, 2009, Ch. 7;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 2 (Review Ch. 6);
Review Sandole, 2007, Ch. 2.

3 Nov

G. Operational Setting: Data Sources. (D)

1. Library/Archival Setting.
2. Natural Setting.

- (a) Surveys (Sampling).
- (b) Field Studies.
- (c) Field Experiments.

3. Artificial Setting.

- (a) Laboratory Experiments.
- (b) Simulation.

4. "Mixed Methods" (*Triangulation*)

**READ: Brewer and Hunter, 2006;
Creswell, 2009, Chs. 8-10;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 3 and App. A;
Sandole, 2007, Ch. 4.**

10 Nov

H. Data Collection.

1. Other-Generated (Existing) Data.

- (a) Personal Documents.
- (b) Statistical Records.
- (c) Mass Communications.
- (d) Scholarly/Literary/Pedagogical Works.

2. Self-Generated Data.

- (a) Interviews.
- (b) Questionnaires.
- (c) Observation.

**READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 and App. B;
Sandole, 2007, Chs. 5-9.**

17 Nov

I. Data "Measurement" and Processing.

1. Translating Data into Indicators.

- (a) *Nominal Level* of Measurement.
 - **Coding** (Content Analysis, 1).
 - Computation of **Modes** and **Ranges**.
- (b) *Ordinal Level* of Measurement.
 - **Scaling** (Content Analysis, 2).
 - Computation of **Medians** and **Quartile Deviations**.
- (c) *Interval/Ratio* Levels of Measurement.
 - Computation of **Means** and **Standard Deviations**.

- Standardization.
- Transformation.

2. *Reliability and Validity* of Indicators.

READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 (cont'd) and App. C;
Sandole, 2007 (cont'd);
Review Backer, et al., 2016.

J. Data Analysis.

1. Trends.
2. Differences.
3. Relationships.

- (a) Correlation.
- (b) Regression.

READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 (cont'd);
Sandole, 2007 (cont'd);
Review Backer, et al., 2016 (cont'd).

24 Nov: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

1 Dec K. **Validating and Interpreting the Results.**

1. Norms of Validation.
 - (a) Correspondence.
 - (b) Pragmatic.
 - (c) Coherence.
2. Statistical Significance.
3. The *Verification - Falsification* Controversy.
4. The Theoretical Setting Revisited. (T)

READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 5-8 and App. D;
Sandole, 2007, Ch. 10.
Review Kuhn, Ch. 12.

VI. **Examples of Applied Research (Continued).**

REVIEW: Sandole, 1999.
Sandole, 2007.
Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009.
Sriram, et al., 2009.

8 Dec VII. Conclusion.

15 Dec RESEARCH DESIGNS/PILOT STUDIES DUE.