

CONF 695-006 - Critical Conflict Resolution - 3 Credits
Spring 2015 - Mondays 4:30pm - 7:10pm, Founders Hall Room 313
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The School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution - George Mason University

Overview

Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall's (2005), *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, has become a core text for both undergraduate and graduate students seeking to understand both the practice and theory of conflict resolution. The authors describe the work of the rising fifth generation of conflict resolution scholars and practitioners as one of dealing with the true complexities of a globalized world, one which is increasingly interconnected and defined by its relationship to new technologies. The authors task the fifth generation to move beyond the field's early Cold War limitations and to pursue the emancipatory thrust of the conflict resolution enterprise. Theirs is a vision that seeks to transcend the equation of conflict resolution practice as synonymous with the preemptive mindset of the Global War on Terror, as well as, to move beyond the dogmatism that perceives conflict resolution as wholly co-opted by liberal governance seeking to expand markets for global capital.

This course fills a void in conflict resolution education and practice by focusing on the present and the future of conflict resolution and its relation to oppressive systems. We move from contemporary conflict resolution practice, to contemporary social and critical theory, and back to practice, in order to develop a critical conflict resolution better suited for addressing contemporary structural conflicts, oppression, and violence. A critical approach illuminates the complex dialectic between theory and practice; we grow to recognize how issues of privilege and power are embedded not only within the parties in conflict, but aspects of ourselves as subjects seeking to engage structures that extend beyond the immediate situation and as possible agents of structural and/or cultural violence.

Students will be asked to explore a range of materials in order to help them develop the self-reflexive and critical analytic skills essential to any conflict resolution practice. It is evident given the field's difficulty responding to events such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street that students of conflict resolution must take the advice of Ramsbotham et al. to heart; the challenges faced by today's generation require an awareness of both global systems and local dynamics. Difficult questions arise as a result. We are asked to consider what lies beyond our own interests and desires to become advocates in a particular conflict, especially those that appear to pit the marginalized against the state or an authoritarian regime. Is there a role for conflict resolution professionals in situations of political upheaval? If so, how does one navigate the terrain of struggle whose aim can range from obtaining basic provisions such as food and shelter to total societal revolutionary change?

We will labor together as a class to explore whether critical conflict resolution is capable of integrating theory, research and practice in a way envisioned by the field's founders to

address these contemporary and in some cases, protracted conflicts. We will reconsider Basic Human Needs Theory as an essential component of our project and what the normative implications of such assumptions are. Further, we will contextualize the influence of global capitalism as a catalyst for asymmetrical violence and the systemic consequences that result (the prison industrial complex, militarism, persistent poverty, etc...)

Learning objectives:

- To contribute meaningfully in the development of critical conflict resolution
- To understand the relationship between structures of violence and conflict and the contemporary practice of conflict resolution
- To integrate a wide range of perspectives on violence and conflict within a structural frame that can influence practice and research
- To connect conflict resolution theory, research, practice and education to contemporary structural conflicts
- To appreciate how conflict resolution can contribute to social change

Prerequisites

Students are expected to have completed a graduate level introductory course to the field of conflict resolution and analysis (CONF 501 or 801). Additionally, it would be beneficial, but not necessary, for students to have completed a graduate seminar focused specifically on theories of conflict (CONF 601, 803, or 804).

Class Assignments

- *One Theorization Essay + Facilitation.* Each student is responsible for leading one session of class based on the primary reading for the day. The student will post a Theorization Essay (see additional handout) to the discussion board on the [S-CAR Community Ning](#) site by 11:59pm of the Friday before the class session. In addition, the student is responsible for moderating the response posts from their fellow classmates in the period leading up to our meeting (see below). Finally, the student will facilitate a class discussion based on their original post and the responses to it during class on Monday. (20%)
- *Discussion Post Responses - 100-200 words max.* Each student is responsible for responding to the week's Theorization Post and your classmates' Final Paper proposals. You will have from the time each Theorization Essay is posted until 11:59pm on Sunday to respond to issues and ideas presented in the paper. Your classmate's Theorization is not intended to replace your own reading of the material, but instead to help prepare you for the discussion on Monday. In addition, you are responsible for thoughtfully responding to each of the Final Paper proposals. (15%)
- *Midterm Project.* (15%)
- *Proposal for Final Term Paper* – 1000 words. (10%)
- *Final Term Paper* – 6000 words. Due during exam week. (20%)
- *Participation and showing up for class* (20%)

Participation

This is a reading and discussion intensive graduate level seminar; it is not a lecture. Students are expected to complete all readings and assignments for a given session prior to their arrival at class. Students are expected to participate in class discussions and activities. Students may be called upon at random to share with the class, present a reading in an upcoming session, and work in groups. The use of electronic devices (computers, ipads, etc...) for the purposes of note taking and readings is permitted. Students are asked to respect their peers by refraining from surfing the Internet, checking Facebook, and responding to emails during class time.

Participation makes up 20% of this course. Attendance is for class sessions, in person or virtually, is mandatory and considered part of a student's participation. Students are allowed to miss one session without impact to their grade. For each additional missed class session students will lose 5% of their participation grade. Graduate students must receive a B (85%) or above to receive passing credit for the course. Incompletes will be given only in the case of a medical emergency and with the appropriate paperwork from a licensed medical doctor.

Academic Integrity

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 regard 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.

University Policies

The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

Accommodations for Disabilities

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Office for

Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; <http://ods.gmu.edu>) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with us to discuss your accommodation needs. This can be done by approaching us during a break or after class, or via email.

Privacy

Students and instructors are encouraged to respect each other's privacy both in the classroom and in digital communication. This means that information shared amongst the class should remain in confidence unless permission has been granted by the individual or group to share that information with others. In addition, students must use their MasonLIVE email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

Commitment to Diversity Statement

GMU is an intentionally inclusive community that celebrates diversity and strives to have faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, class, linguistic background, religion, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, or physical ability.

Emergency Alerts

In the event of an emergency a telephone and exit strategy are located in this classroom. In addition, I am registered to receive University emergency alerts. It is suggested that two or more students do the same. To receive emergency alerts, register at alert.gmu.edu

Required Texts to Purchase

Students should obtain these texts, either in hardcopy or electronic version, from their preferred vendor. Many of these texts are available online and for free. The links included are for reference only.

Butler, J. (2009). [*Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*](#) London; New York: Verso.

Fraser, N. (2013). [*The Fortunes of Feminism: From State Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*](#). New York: Verso.

hooks, b. (1994). [*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*](#). New York: Routledge.

Other texts and articles are available online by following the links provided in the syllabus or emailed to you prior to the class session. Links for book content will expire at the end of the semester so it is recommended that you download these files to your desktop for future use.