

George Mason University

School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR)

CONF 642: Integration of Theory and Practice

Semester: Spring 2015  
Class Time: Wednesdays, 4:30-7:10 pm  
Location: Arlington Campus, Founders Hall, Rm. 476  
Instructor: Dennis J.D. Sandole, Ph.D.  
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**COURSE BACKGROUND**

This course has not always existed at S-CAR, although it came into existence fairly early in S-CAR's evolution due to student demand for a "capstone" course at the end of their MSc. studies to help them "*pull it all together.*"

What this meant has not always been clear. MSc. students take courses and have related experiences in *theory*, *research methods*, and *practice*, so conceivably, "pulling it all together" means to *somehow* integrate theory, research methods, and practice.

Early on, some S-CAR faculty felt that this kind of "integration" was something that students should do for themselves, as was the case in other disciplines. But other faculty thought that conflict analysis and resolution (CAR) was not like other disciplines, and was instead a *multi-discipline* and an *applied-theory* field. Consequently, they felt that S-CAR should offer something at the end of students' studies to facilitate the integrative process.

Hence, this "course"! Although, like other courses, it includes lectures, readings, class presentations, class exercises, and written assignments, CONF 642 is nevertheless unique because its primary subject matter comprises the wisdom represented by *all of the courses* students have taken by the time they enroll. Accordingly, as a partial framing of the totality of the CAR field, CONF 642 is *not* a "course" in the "normal" sense.

This presents us -- students and faculty -- with a challenge: How to make the course "work"! This syllabus represents one *static* contribution to the process. The rest is

up to us -- teacher and student -- and our *dynamics*: Our respective weekly contributions, informed by appropriate preparation, plus our interactions, including reciprocal feedback, over the course of the next 12 or so weeks.

## CLASS DESCRIPTION

Given this background information, CONF 642 is the capstone course for S-CAR's MSc. students, designed to provide them, in *their final semester*, with opportunities to "bring it all together," to *integrate* into a *coherent whole* all that they have been exposed to in the program: Conflict resolution *theory* and *practice*, with *research methods* playing a pivotal role, facilitating the application of theory to practice and, via *evaluation research*, the implications of practice for theory.

Accordingly, my goal as instructor is to encourage and help students to weave together into a coherent system "bits and pieces" from their previously taken courses dealing with:

(a) **Theory [A]** on the *causes* and *conditions* of [violent] conflict initiation and escalation at *all* levels;

(b) **Theory [B]** on hypothesized approaches and *processes* for dealing with conflicts at *all* levels, plus **Practice** of actual approaches and *processes* for dealing with conflicts at *all* levels; and

(c) **Research methods** for applying theory to practice and feeding the results of practice back to theory.

We will explore the "integratability" of these and other components of our multidisciplinary field by structuring the course around three (3) Core Questions:

- (1) "*What do we know?*"
- (2) "*What don't we know?*" And
- (3) "*How can we find out what we don't know?*"

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Prerequisites:** S-CAR MSc. students in their *final semester*.

## 2. **Assessment:**

(a) There will be one final paper in which students will integrate the course readings (see below) into a *coherent mapping of the multidisciplinary field of conflict analysis and resolution* (25-30 double-spaced pages); **due: Wednesday, 13 May 2015 (80% of final grade)**.

(b) Students will also participate in class discussions of the status of the field, and course readings (**20% of final grade**).

**Office Hours:** After class (7:15-8:00 pm) and by appointment.

**Withdrawal:** The last day to drop the course without tuition penalty is 29 January 2015.

## **REQUIRED READINGS**

(1) David A. Backer, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Paul K. Huth. *Peace and Conflict 2014*. Paradigm Publishers, 2014. **ISBN 978-1-61205-436-0 [Paperback]**.

(2) Morton Deutsch, Peter T. Coleman, and Eric C. Marcus (eds.). *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (2d Edition). Jossey-Bass, 2006. **ISBN 978-0-78798-058-0 [Hardback]**.

(3) Christopher Mitchell. *The Nature of Intractable Conflict: Resolution in the Twenty-First Century*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. **ISBN 978-1-403-94519-8 [Paperback]**.

(4) Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts* (3rd Edition). Polity Press, 2011. **ISBN 978-0-74564-974-0 [Paperback]**.

(5) Dennis J.D. Sandole. "A Comprehensive Mapping of Conflict and Conflict Resolution: A Three Pillar Approach." *Peace and Conflict Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1998, pp. 1-30. Available online at: [www.gmu.edu/academic/pcs/sandole](http://www.gmu.edu/academic/pcs/sandole)

(6) Dennis J.D. Sandole, Sean Byrne, Ingrid Sandole-Staroste, and Jessica Senehi (eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009. **ISBN 978-0-415-57735-9 [Paperback]**.

(7) Dennis J.D. Sandole, *Peacebuilding: Preventing Violent Conflict in a Complex World*. Polity Press, 2010. **ISBN 978-0-7456-4166-9 [Paperback]**.

(8) Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. Bloomsbury, 2011. **ISBN 978-1-60819-341-7 [Paperback]**.

### Course Structure

28 Jan: Introduction.

- A. Student Expectations.
- B. Integration for "What"? (Ex: The "Journey").
- C. Three Core Questions, re: Theory A, Theory B/ Practice, and Research Methods:
  - 1. "What Do We Know?"
  - 2. "What Don't We Know?"
  - 3. "How Can We Find Out What We Don't Know?"
- D. Course Overview.
- E. Assignments for Presentations on Course Readings

4 Feb: The Unifying Subject Matter of the Field: *Conflict* [Latent, Manifest, and/or Violent].

- A. Conflicts Likely to Characterize the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
  - 1. The US: Likely to remain the most violent country in the industrialized world?
    - a. Gun-related violence.
    - b. Police-community relations.
  - 2. Worldwide: Anticipated trends in *identity-based* and other conflicts; e.g., ethnic, racial, religious conflicts? Terrorism? "Clashes of Civilization"?
    - a. Relations between Europe's Muslim communities and dominant ingroups.
    - b. Global distribution of extremist groups and the Islamic State.
  - 3. Environmental Degradation and Resource Scarcities, plus Natural Disasters (e.g., tsunamis, hurricanes, wild fires, etc.). US Department of Defense: "Global warming is a *threat multiplier!*"

Read: Backer, et al., *Peace and Conflict 2014*.

B. The Moral and Practical Need to "Do the Right Thing": the Raison d'etre for *Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (CAR).

11 Feb: Theory - The 3PF and Other Frameworks for Facilitating Responses to the 3 Core Questions and for *Bringing It All Together "in Theory"*.

Read:

Ramsbotham et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Ch. 1;

Sandole, "A Comprehensive Mapping of Conflict and Conflict Resolution," all; and

Sandole, *Peacebuilding*, Chs. 1-2.

18 Feb: **No class.**

25 Feb: Examination of Evidence-based Primary Driver of Violent Conflict: **Structural Violence**.

Read: Wilkinson and Pickett, *The Spirit Level*.

4 Mar: Continuation of discussion of "structural violence".

**11 Mar: Semester Break.**

18 Mar: Exploration of 3 Core Questions in light of Deutsch, et. al., *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution*.

25 Mar: Continuation of discussion based on Deutsch, et al.

1 Apr: Exploration of 3 Core Questions in light of Sandole, et al., *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*.

8 Apr: Continuation of discussion based on Sandole, et al.

15 Apr: Exploration of 3 Core Questions in light of Ramsbotham, et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*.

22 Apr: Continuation of discussion of 3 Core Questions In light of Ramsbotham, et al.

29 Apr: Exploration of 3 Core Questions in Light of Mitchell,

*The Nature of Intractable Conflict.*

- 6 May: A Dynamic Process -- Scenarios Development - for Bringing It All Together "in Practice".
- A. Identity a *Conflict* (Current, Developing or Potential) that Could Worsen during the Next 5-10 Years (*Pillar 1*). *Option: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.*
  - B. Explore Conflict Trajectories:
    - 1. Identify the Factors -- "*Drivers*" -- that Could Make the Conflict Worse or Better (*Pillar 2*).
    - 2. Construct a *Scenario* Indicating How these Factors Could Combine to Make the Conflict Worse (Worst-Case Scenario=Negative Trajectory) or Better (Best-Case Scenario=Positive Trajectory) (*Pillar 2*).
  - C. Design a *Strategy* for Responding to these Factors ("*Drivers*") to Either Undermine their Potential Negative Impact or Enhance their Positive Impact on the Conflict (*Pillar 3*).

13 May: **Final Papers Due.**