

**CONF 301**  
**Research and Inquiry in Conflict Resolution**  
TR 10:30 -11:45  
IN 205

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Office Hours  
TR 11:45-12:45

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The goal of conflict research is to answer certain questions about protracted conflicts. Why do conflicts occur? How do they evolve? What are the social and/or political forces that caused them? Who is affected by the resulting violence? And, how can conflicts be prevented, or, if not prevented then reduced in severity? Of course, the nature of protracted conflicts makes these questions very difficult to answer. Protracted conflicts are extremely complex, difficult to understand fully, and virtually impossible to predict. These problems create special challenges for researchers. Brief descriptions are always inadequate, and explanations that rely on a single cause are shallow. Yet, the importance for answering the questions above cannot be overstressed. So, how is this done?

This course examines the kinds of activities and skills needed for a genuine understanding of the cause, conditions, and characteristic of conflicts, of various sorts. Such understanding requires identifying the problems/questions that motivate the researchers, planning on the ways to gather information, and determining the meaning of the information. No single method can serve the needs of all researchers, for all kinds of conflict. The necessity of multiple methods, to reveals the complexity of every conflict, is obvious.

This course is organized around themes that are particularly central to our field. Throughout the semester, we will show how questions about the character of a particular conflict merge with decisions about methodology, and that methodology is learned through a critical reflection on case studies. We will also engage in “do it yourself” activities to practice the learned skills.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Engage in critical reflection of the goals of research and inquiry
- Integrate research with theory and practice
- Apply the methods of quantitative research to cases of protracted conflict.
- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative research.
- Apply the methods of qualitative research to cases of protracted conflict.
- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of methods of qualitative research.
- Examine the normative underpinnings of both qualitative research and quantitative research.

## TEXTS

Keith F. Punch, Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches. Second Edition. Sage Publications. 2005. ISBN 10 0-7619-4417-6 (pbk) [ISR]

Charles C. Ragin, Constructing Social Research. Pine Forge Press. 1994. ISBN: 0-8039-9021-9 (paper) [CSR]

### **Additional Chapters:**

All the chapters below are available through the Library's Ereserve system using the following Link to search Electronic Reserves.

<http://furbo.gmu.edu/cgi-bin/ers/OSCRgen.cgi>

Course: 301-001/ Instructor: Rothbart  
Electronic Reserve for: CONF 301  
Your password is: know  
Do not use spaces or caps for passwords.

### **Teaching Technology: Blackboard**

courses.gmu.edu  
gmU.blackboard.com

username:  
password:  
OK

We use Blackboard for the following

Syllabus  
Links to Ereserve articles

### **Articles/book chapters:**

#1 Rambotham, et. al., "Statistics of Deadly Quarrels" in Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Chapter 3, pp. 55-77.

#2 Donna Henderson-King, et. al., "Seeking Understanding or Sending Bombs: Beliefs as Predictors of Responses to Terrorism" Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 10 (1): 67-84.

#3 General Guide/Template for a Research Design or Proposal

#4 Ibrahim A. Kira, et. al., "The Effects of Torture: Two Community Studies" Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 12 (3): 205-228.

#5 Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gleditsch, "Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths" European Journal of Population (2005) 21: 145-166

#6 Inger Skjelsbaek, "Therapeutic Work with victim of sexual violence" Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 12 (2): 93-118.

#7 Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural Symbol" in The Interpretation of Cultures, pp. 87-125.

#8 Tal Litvak-Hirsch, et. al., "Whose House is this? Dilemmas of Identity Construction in the Israeli-Palestinian Context" Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 9 (2): 127-148.

#9 Angel Veale and Aki Stavrou, "Former Lord's Resistance Army Child Soldier Abductees: Explorations of identity in Reintegration and Reconciliation" Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 13(3): 273-292.

#10 Winnifred R. Louis, "Intergroup Positioning and Power," in Fathali M. Moghaddam, Rom Harré, and Naomi Lee, eds., Global Conflict Resolution through Positioning Analysis, pp. 21-40.

#11 Ciaran Benson, "The Unthinkable boundaries of self: the role of negative emotional boundaries for the formation, maintenance, and transformation of identities," in Rom Harré and Fathali Moghaddam, eds., The Self and Others, pp. 61-84.

#12 Debra Kaminer, "Forgiveness Attitudes of Truth Commission Deponents: Relation to Commission Response During Testimony" Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 12(2): 175-187.

13. Bush and Folger, "The Transformative View of Conflict and Mediation" The Promise of Mediation, Chapter 2.

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS**

August 26: Introduction to Course

### **Unit I. Patterns of Violent Conflicts**

August 28 and September 2: [Conflict Topic] The causes, conditions and characteristics of violent conflicts

Rambotham, et. al., "Statistics of Deadly Quarrels" in Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Chapter 3

Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gleditsch, "Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths"

September 4 September 9: [Methodology] What are the problems and the questions?

Ragin, "What is Social Research?" Chapter 1 in CSR.

Punch, "Some Central Issues" Chapter 2 in ISR.

Punch, "Research Questions" Chapter 3 ISR.

Ragin, "The Process of Social Research: Ideas and Evidence" Chapter 3 in CSR.

September 11 September 16: [Methodology] Research Design

General Guide/Template for a Research Design or Proposal  
Punch, "From Research Questions to Data," Chapter 4 in ISR.

Punch, "Quantitative Research Design," Chapter 5 in ISR.

September 18 September 23: [Case study #1 and "Do It Yourself"] Milgram's experiments on Violence

Critical Reflection on Milgram's experiment  
Developing a Plan: Assistance on Assignment #1.

### **Unit 2: The Effects of Violence on its Victims**

September 25: [Case Study #2] Long-term effects of Torture

Ibrahim A. Kira, et. al., "The Effects of Torture: Two Community Studies"

September 30 and October 2: [Methodology] Finding and Analyzing Data

Punch, "Collecting quantitative Data," Chapter 6 in ISR.

Punch, "The Analysis of Quantitative Data," Chapter 7 in ISR.

October 7: [Methodology] Seeking Correlations or Causes.

October 9: ["Do It Yourself"] Review for Mid-term Exam

### **Unit 3: Who are the Conflict Protagonists?**

October 16: [Conflict Topic and Case Study #3]

Tal Litvak-Hirsch, et. al., "Whose House is this? Dilemmas of Identity Construction in the Israeli-Palestinian Context"

October 21 and October 21: [Methodology] Ethnographic Research

Punch, "Qualitative Research: Overview, Design and Grounded Theory," Chapter 8 in ISR, pp. 134-148.

Punch, "Collecting Qualitative Data," Chapter 9 in ISR.

Punch, "Qualitative Research: Overview, Design and Grounded Theory," Chapter 8 in ISR, pp. 148-155

Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural Symbol" in The Interpretation of Cultures, pp. 87-125.

October 23 and October 28: ["Do It Yourself"] Personal Ethnography; Field Research [in-class]

October 30 and November 4: [Methodology and Case Study #4] Grounded Theory

Ragin, "Using Qualitative Methods to Study Commonalities," Chapter 4 in CSR.

Punch, "Qualitative Research: Overview, Design and Grounded Theory," Chapter 8 in ISR, pp. 155-164.

Debra Kaminer, "Forgiveness Attitudes of Truth Commission Deponents: Relation to Commission Response During Testimony"

Punch, "The Analysis of Qualitative Data" Chapter 10 of ISR.

#### **Unit 4: From Violence to Peace**

November 6 and November 11: [Conflict Topic] Relationships Transformed

Winnifred R. Louis, "Intergroup Positioning and Power," in Fathali M. Moghaddam, Rom Harré, and Naomi Lee, eds., Global Conflict Resolution through Positioning Analysis.

Ciaran Benson, "The Unthinkable boundaries of self: the role of negative emotional boundaries for the formation, maintenance, and transformation of identities," in Rom Harré and Fathali Moghaddam, eds., The Self and Others.

November 13 and November 18: [Conflict Topic and Case Study #5] The Dynamics of Conflict Settings

Bush and Folger, "The Transformative View of Conflict and Mediation" The Promise of Mediation, Chapter 2.

Angel Veale and Aki Stavrou, "Former Lord's Resistance Army Child Soldier Abductees: Explorations of identity in Reintegration and Reconciliation"

November 25 December 2: ["Do It Yourself"]

Class presentations of case studies.

December 4: Integration of conflict themes, methodology, and case studies.

#### **Course Requirements:**

Each class session will include a discussion-component that calls for active participation. Of course, regular attendance is expected.

The course grade will be determined by an evaluation of the following four assignments.

Assignment #1: Each student will construct a plan for research on a conflict-related topic of your choice. The elements of the template will be followed. [20% of course grade.]

Assignment #2: The mid-term will be distributed in class during session 11, and returned in one week. [25% of course grade.]

Assignment #3. Case study of transformation in relations among conflict protagonists. For your case study you will use the methods of inquiry from this course to demonstrate that the relations among protagonists changed from one of violence and hatred to peace and harmony. So, you will select a conflict setting in which protagonists altered the ways in which they address grievances and deal with potentially contentious issues in their relations to the Other. This is a team project, but the grading will be distributed on an individual basis. [30% of course grade, individual.]

Assignment #4: Final Exam distributed December 4, due December 11, 10:30-1:15 [25% of course grade.]

### **HONOR POLICY**

All students are expected to abide by the Honor Code:

Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work. Failure to comply with this code may result in academic penalty in accordance with the procedures of the Honor Committee.