

CONF 320, Sect 002: Interpersonal Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Course Information: Thursdays, 1:20 – 4:00 Robison Hall - B, Room 120
Instructor, Dr. Joan Orgon Coolidge; email: jcoolidg@gmu.edu
Office hours by appointment, Thursdays work best

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores a variety of theories, models, and frameworks for analyzing and resolving interpersonal conflict. Students will begin by exploring the role of conflict in their own individual development, family relations, and social experiences, and the tools they currently employ to handle conflicts. The course will then focus on theories and analytical tools that help frame a range of common interpersonal conflicts, their possible associated causes, and methods of inquiry and intervention that lead to resolution. Of equal importance, students will practice skills for responding constructively to conflict and engaging in difficult conversations. Through analysis, exercises, and role-plays, students will reflect on “Who am I and what do I bring to this particular conflict?” and further, “What are my range of options to begin the resolution process?”

COURSE MATERIALS

Required texts (available in the GMU bookstore):

Gopin, Marc. Healing the heart of Conflict: 8 Crucial Steps to Making Peace with Yourself and Others. Rodale Inc; Holtzbrinck Publishers, 2004.

Stone, Douglas, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen. Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most. New York: Viking, 1999.

Tavris, Carol and Elliot Aronson. Mistakes Were Made (but not by me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2007.

Additional Readings (found on E-Reserves or distributed in class):

Apatow, Robert. “The Classical Model of Dialogue” The Spiritual Art of Dialogue. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1998, 5-11. (distributed in class)

Anderson, Walter Truett. “Science and the Creative Brain” Reality Isn’t What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World. San Francisco: Harpers, 1990, 55-71. (e-reserve)

Bohm, David. “On Dialogue” (Nichol, Lee ed) On Dialogue. London: Routledge, 1996, 6-15. (e-reserve)

Chesler, Phyllis. “Indirect Aggression among Girls and Teenagers” Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman. New York: The Penguin Group, 2001. 78-123. (e-reserve)

- Fisher, Roger and Alan Sharp. "Introduction" and "Getting it Done" Getting It Done: How to Lead When You're not in Charge. New York: Harpers Business, xi-13. (distributed in class)
- Folger, Joseph P., Marshall Scott Poole and Randall K. Stutman, "Face-Saving" Working Through Conflict. New York: Longman, Inc., 2001. 155-184. (e-reserve)
- Heifetz, Ronald A. "Values in Leadership" Leadership Without Easy Answers. Cambridge, MA: Bleknap Press, 1994, 13-27. (e-reserve)
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. "Concepts We Live By," "The Systematicity of Metaphorical Concepts," "Metaphor, Truth, and Action," and "'Truth' Metaphors We Live By." Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. 3-9, 156-166. (distributed in class)
- Mullen, John D. and Byron M. Roth. "Psychological Impediments to Sound Decision-Making" Decision Making: Its Logic and Practice. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991, 19-49. (e-reserve)
- Sites, Paul. "Needs as Analogues to Emotions" (Burton, John ed) Conflict: Human Needs Theory. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990. 7-33. (e-reserve)
- Tannen, Deborah. "Asymmetries: Women and Men Talking at Crosspurposes" You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation. New York: Ballantine Books, 1990. 49-73. (e-reserve)
- Wilmot, William W. and Joyce L. Hocker. "Moderating Your Conflicts." Interpersonal Conflict, 7th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007, 210-242. (e-reserve)

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

Participation 20 %

Because much of this course involves in-class, experiential learning, participation constitutes a significant portion of the course grade. While course attendance is expected, *just showing up for class does not represent 'A' participation work*. Students are expected to show up on time for each class and stay for the duration, to complete their reading assignments on time, and to participate in class discussions and exercises. In the rare case that you must be absent from class, please notify me in advance.

***Spotlight on a Peacemaker:** Each class, one student will offer a brief highlight the contributions of a well-known peacemaker that inspires him or her. Students may choose from narratives that will be circulated in class. This 2-3 minute presentation will be noted as part of your participation grade.

Reflective Practice Exercises & Journal 20 %

Students will be given a series of six home reflective practice exercises that will

accompany in-class learning. Specific instructions for each assignment will be provided in class. Students will be asked to write journal entries reflecting on these exercises that seek to develop “mindfulness” as a third-party conflict intervenor.

Mid-term Exam 20 %

The mid-term exam will contain short-answer and essay questions related to interpersonal conflict scenarios, class materials and activities as well as assigned readings.

Team Presentation 20%

In teams of 3-4, students prepare a team presentation critiquing an interpersonal dimension of a conflict scenario from a film and present an analysis and recommendations for possible resolution or prevention of the conflict. Presentations should last approximately 15-20 minutes, including a 3-5 minute clip from the film. Specific instructions for this assignment will be provided in class. Suggested films include, but are not limited to: *Arranged*, *Crash*, *Invictus*, and *On Golden Pond*.

Final Exam 20 %

The final exam for this course will be an in-class essay exam that emphasizes (but may not be limited to) application of information learned in this class to specific conflict situations or scenarios.

***Cell phones and Computers: As a courtesy to all, please keep cell phones OFF during class. Use of computers is not permitted as this course is experiential, requires full participation and class slides are provided for notes. Thanks for your cooperation.

CLASS TOPICS AND READINGS

Jan. 27

Topic: Who Am I?

Introduction to the course, syllabus review

Step #1: “BE”, narrative

Introduction to listening: Attentiveness

- **Readings:** Gopin, Intro & Ch 1 & 2, “Be...Feel”, (pgs. 1-58)
Stone, Intro & Ch 1, “Sort Out the Three Conversations”, (pgs. 1-20)

Feb 3:

Topic: Who Am I?: From the Outside In

Narrative: Knowing your story & being known

Identity, Culture & Worldview

- **Readings:** Lakoff and Johnson, “Concepts We Live By...”, (3-9, 156-166)
- Stone, Ch 6, “Ground Your Identity”, (pgs. 111-128)
- *Due: Journal Assignment #1: Photo Phenomenology*

- Feb 10: **Topic: Who Am I?: From the Inside Out**
 *Guest Speaker – Dr. Curt Thompson – to be confirmed
 From the Inside Out: Neuroscience & links between early social experiences and later social interactions
 Step #3: “UNDERSTAND”
 Skills practice: Mindfulness
- **Readings:** Stone, “The What Happened Conversation”, Ch 2–4, (pgs. 21-82)
 Gopin, Ch 3, “Understand”, (pgs. 59-82)
 - *Due: Journal Assignment #2: Family Systems Map*
- Feb. 17: **Topic: Cognition Dissonance**
 Cognitive dissonance, Selection and interpretation of information
 Cognitive perspectives on interpersonal conflict
- **Readings:** Tavis, Intro and Ch 1 & 2. “Cognitive Dissonance”, “Pride and Prejudice”, (pgs. 1-67)
 - Tavis, Ch 7, “Wounds, Rifts and Wars” & Ch 8, “Letting Go and Owning Up”, (pgs. 185-238)
 Folger, Poole and Stutman, “Face-saving”, (pgs 155-184)
- Skills practice: identifying cognitive dissonance, responding well
- *Due: Journal Assignment #3: Mindfulness: Internal and External Responses*
- Feb. 24: **Topics: Emotions and Interpersonal Conflict**
 Step #2 “FEEL”
 Basic human needs and emotions in the interpersonal realm
 Skills practice: dealing with/receiving strong emotions
 *Form groups for team assignments
- **Readings:** Stone, Ch 5, “The Feelings Conversation”, (pgs 83-108)
 Tavis, Ch 3, “Memory, the Self-Justifying Historian”, (pgs 68-96)
 Sites, “Needs as Analogous to Emotions”, (pgs 7-33)
 - *Due: Journal Assignment #4: Mindfulness: Recognizing Dominant and Latent Emotions*
- Mar. 3: **Topic: Communication and Interpersonal Conflict**
 Step #4 “HEAR”, listening and Step #5 “SEE”, observation
 Interpersonal Conflicts: How they start, and how they escalate.
 Skills practice: analyzing interpersonal conflict situations; reframing
- **Readings:** Gopin, Ch 4 “Hear” & 5 “See”, (pgs 83-126)
 Stone, Ch 6–7
 Tavis: Ch 6, “Love’s Assassin”, (pgs 158-184)
 - *Due: Journal Assignment #5: Mindfulness: Examination of Conscience*

- Mar. 10: **Topics: Gender, roles and power dynamics**
 Theory mapping exercise (in groups)
 Skills practice: reframing and deep listening
- **Readings:** Tannen, “Assymetries: Women and Men Talking at
 - Crosspurposes”, (pgs 49-73)
 - Chesler, “Indirect Agression Among Girls and Teenager”, (pgs
 - 78-123)
 - Tavris, Chapter 6
 - *Due: Journal Assignment #6: Mindfulness: Silence and Deep Listening*
 - **Reflective Practice “mindfulness” Journals**
- Mar. 17: **Topic: Vision and Change**
 *Guest Speaker, Dr. Margot Eyring
 Step #6: “IMAGINE” and Step #7: “DO”
 Readings: Gopin, Ch 6 “Imagine” & 7 (“Do), (pgs. 127-176)
 Wilmot and Hocker, “Moderating your Conflicts, (pgs. 210-242)
 Skills Practice: Being a creative change-agent
- **Midterm**
- Mar. 24: **Spring Break**
- Mar 31: **Topic: Dialogue and Interpersonal Conflict**
 Step #8: “SPEAK”, Language and communication
 Debate, discussion, and dialogue
- **Readings:** Gopin, Ch 8 “The Challenge of Dialogue and Communication”,
 - (pgs. 177-198)
 - Bohm, “On Dialogue”, (pgs. 6-15)
 - Apatow, “The Classical Model of Dialogue”, (pgs 5-11)
- April 7: **Topic: Third-party Roles in Interpersonal Conflict**
 Skills practice: Negotiating a process, not just and outcome
- **Readings:** Fisher and Sharp, “Intro & Getting it Done”, (pgs xi-13)
 - Stone, Ch 8–10, “Getting Started...Learning...Expression”,
 - (pgs. 147-200)
- April 14: *Due: Team presentations and discussion*

- April 21: **Topic: Leadership in Interpersonal Conflict**
 Decision-making
 Skills Practice: Group decision-making exercise
- **Readings:** Mullen and Roth, “Psychological Impediments to Sound Decision-making”, (pgs. 1-10, 19-49)
 - Heifetz, “Values in Leadership”, (pgs 13-27)
 - Stone, Ch 11-12, “Problem-Solving...Putting it all Together”, (pgs 201-234)
- April 28: **Topic: Healing the Heart of Conflict**
 *Guest Speaker, Dr. Marc Gopin (TBC)
- **Readings:** Gopin, Ch 9-11, “The Eight Steps Applied”, (pgs 199-294)
- May 5: **Topic: Integration**
 Semester Review, mapping theories and concepts of interpersonal conflict
 Wrap up: Assessing and applying interpersonal conflicts, theory and approaches to resolution
- May 5: **Final Exam**

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND INFORMATION

Academic Honesty and Collaboration

George Mason University has an Honor Code with guidelines regarding academic integrity and which is designed, “to promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community”(www.gmu.edu/catalog/policies). The Honor Code lays out strict penalties for cheating and plagiarism. All written work for this course should include proper citations in a standard citation format (MLA, APA, etc.).

For individual class assignments, you may discuss your ideas with others or ask for feedback; however, you are responsible for making certain that there is no question that the work you hand in is your own. You may not submit papers or presentations from other courses to fulfill assignments for this class. For group class assignments, the names of all participants should appear on the work. While it’s fine for groups to divide project work among team members, the final product that’s submitted should represent a single, conceptually-linked piece of work. With rare exception, each student working in a group is given the same grade for an assignment. *If a group is having trouble with a member not fulfilling their work obligation, then the group needs to bring the problem to the instructor’s attention immediately.*

Late Work

Class assignments that are submitted late will be penalized by one letter grade for each day they are late. If a student has a documented emergency, special arrangements can be made with the instructor.

Paper Format

Papers for the course should be typed, double-spaced, have 1” margins, and use a common 12-point font. The pages should be numbered and stapled together. Papers should have a title, include your name and the instructor’s name, and consistently follow a single standard academic citation format (MLA, APA, etc.).

Evaluation

Grading Scale: Points Accumulated, Letter Grade

Points Accumulated	Grade
98-100	A+
93-97	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
79-82	B-
75-78	C
69-71	C-
61-68	D
0-60	F

STUDENT RESOURCES

GMU Writing Center

As a resource for all its students, George Mason offers free writing support no matter what your writing abilities are. Writing specialists can be found in Robinson A114 and Enterprise 076. Although the Center takes walk-ins, it is best to make an appointment at 703-993-1200 or online at <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>.

Disability Support Services

Any student with documented learning disabilities or other conditions that may affect academic performance should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Support Services (993-2474) to determine the possible accommodations you might need; and 2) contact her or his instructor to discuss reasonable accommodations. “George Mason University is committed to providing appropriate services and accommodations that allow self-identified students with disabilities to access programs and activities at the university as stated in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. To achieve this goal, the university maintains and supports the Disability Resource Center Office which is responsible for assuring that students receive the services and accommodations to which they are

entitled. The professional staff of the Disability Resource Center Office coordinate services for students with disabilities, determine reasonable services and accommodations on the basis of disability, and act as a liaison between students and faculty/administration on concerns relating to services and accommodations”

See: (<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/advising/dss.html>)