

CONF 610.001 -- Philosophy and Methods of Conflict Research

Tuesday/Thursday

1:30 – 4:10

October 17-Dec. 12

Arlington: Founders Hall 312

Dr. Daniel Rothbart

Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Director, Masters Program

Office: S-CAR: Metropolitan Building room 5102

drothbar@gmu.edu

phone: 703-993-4474

DESCRIPTION

The importance of research in our field is obvious. Research is vital for mapping a conflict, for learning about the conflict actors - who they are, what they do, and how they think – understanding the factors that drove them to engage in hostile relations, and about their future behaviors. Conflict practitioners also rely on research in their work, for example, in designing plans for a possible intervention, learning about the conflict parties, and evaluating an intervention's outcome and impact.

This course centers on the 'what' and 'how' of research on real world conflicts. Particular attention is given the importance of multiple research methods that rest upon different perspectives. The course content represents a blend of important research topics and case studies. The following topics are introduced: how to generate research questions, how to set up a research design, what methods should be deployed that best addresses the research questions, and the standards for engaging in a critical reflection of conflict research. These topics are illustrated by examples that are drawn from recent studies of real world conflicts. The course includes hands-on activities that simulate the world, on a small scale, of conflict researchers.

The course also attends to fundamental questions about the nature of conflict research. (1) How can conflict analysts and/or practitioner acquire genuine knowledge of the causes, conditions, and consequences of a conflict? (2) What exactly is the subject matter of conflict research, in terms of the nature of real world conflicts and their causes? (3) Which methods best serve the objectives of analysts and practitioners, and how should such methods be deployed in real world research?

These questions will be addressed according through various activities, such as applying the general concepts and themes about research to real world conflicts, actively engaging in a critical reflection of such research by probing various strengths and weaknesses, and engaging in various hand-on activities throughout the semester.

OJECTIVES

- To learn the central concepts and tools for research in conflict analysis and conflict resolution
- To learn or improve upon certain skills of gathering information of various sources
- To learn the strengths and weaknesses of different methods of analysis
- The understand the central elements of sound research designs

- To examine critically the underlying philosophical assumptions of conflict research, including skills of critical reflection on research
- To learn how to communicate the research design and results
- To understand the ethical underpinnings of research

GMU EMAIL ACCOUNTS

Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class.

Readings

Books Required: [Purchase at the Arlington Campus Bookstore]

Robson, C. (2002). Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers (3rd ed.). Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers

Elliott, J. (2005) Using Narrative in Social Research. SAGE Publications. ISBN: 978-1-4129-0041-6 pbk.

Articles and Chapters Required:

All additional readings should be accessible through the GMU's blackboard at <https://gmu.blackboard.com/>. To use the blackboard, allow pop ups, enter you GMU e-mail username and password and choose CONF610 summer 2013 from the menu.

E. King, "Memory Controversies in Post Genocide Rwanda"

Inger Skjelsbaek, "Therapeutic Work with victims of Sexual Violence"

Angela Veale, "Former Lord Resistance Army's Child Soldier Abductees"

Hollis and Smith, "Explaining"

Robb Willer & Nick Adams "The threat of terrorism and support for the 2008 presidential candidates: results of a national field experiment"

Paul Wehr, "Conflict Mapping"

Accessible: <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/cmap.htm>

D. Kaminer, "Exploratory Research Report: Forgiveness Attitudes of Truth Commission Deponents: Relation to Commission Response During Testimony"

Tal Litvak-Hirsch; Dan Bar-On; Julia Chaitin, "Whose House is This? Dilemmas of Identity Construction in the Israeli-Palestinian Context"

Rothbart and Korostelina, "Limitations of Social Identity theories in Relation to Conflict Analysis"

Ibrahim Kira, "The Effects of Torture"

Bert Westerlundh, Sven Birger Hansson, Fredrik Björklund, and Martin Bäckström, "On the nature and expression of ethnic prejudice as seen in judgments of pictorial stimuli"

Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy, Les Roberts, "Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey"

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Session 1 [Oct 17]: Challenges of Conflict Research

UNIT I: Planning Research Projects

Session 2 [Oct 22]: Alternative Approaches to Research

Robson, C. *Real World Research*, Chapters 1 and 2

E. King, "Memory Controversies in Post-Genocide Rwanda"

Session 3 [Oct 24]: Planning Research using Flexible Design

Robson, C. *Real World Research*, Chapters 6 and 7

Inger Skjelsbaek, "Therapeutic Work with victims of Sexual Violence"

Session 4 [Oct 29] A class divided

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/etc/view.html>

Session 5: [Oct 31] Planning Narrative Research

Elliott, J. *Using Narrative in Social Research*, Chapters 1 and 2

Angela Veale, "Former Lord Resistance Army's Child Soldier Abductees"

Session 6: [Nov. 5]: Planning Research using Fixed Design

Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research*, Chapter 5

Hollis and Smith, "Explaining"

Robb Willer & Nick Adams "The threat of terrorism and support for the 2008 presidential candidates: results of a national field experiment"

Session 7: [Nov. 7]: Planning Research for Particular Purposes

Robson, C. *Real World Research*, Chapters 8 and 9.

Paul Wehr, “Conflict Mapping”

<http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/cmap.htm>

UNIT II: Collecting and Analyzing Data

Session 8: [Nov. 12]: Collecting Data: Surveys and Questionnaires

Robson, C. *Real World Research*, Chapter 10

D. Kaminer, “Exploratory Research Report: Forgiveness Attitudes of Truth Commission Deponents: Relation to Commission Response During Testimony”

http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/sfcg_evaluations.html

Session 9: [Nov. 14]: Collecting Data: Interviews and Observations

Robson, C. *Real World Research*, Chapters 11, 12, 13

Session 10: [Nov. 19]: Narrative Approach to Qualitative Data

Robson, C. *Real World Research*, Chapter 17

Elliott, J. Using Narratives in Social Research, Chapter 3

Session 11: [Nov. 21]: Narrative Approach to Identity and Difference

Elliott, J. Using Narratives in Social Research, Chapter 7

Tal Litvak-Hirsch; Dan Bar-On; Julia Chaitin, “Whose House is This? Dilemmas of Identity Construction in the Israeli-Palestinian Context”

Rothbart and Korostelina, “Limitations of Society Identity theories in Relation to Conflict Analysis”

Session 12: [Nov. 26]: Analyzing Quantitative Data

Robson, C. *Real World Research*, Chapter 16

Ibrahim Kira, “The Effects of Torture”

Bert Westerlundh, Sven Birger Hansson, Fredrik Björklund, and Martin Bäckström, “On the nature and expression of ethnic prejudice as seen in judgments of pictorial stimuli”

Session 13: [Dec. 3]: Uncovering Causal Processes

Elliott, J. Using Narratives in Social Research, Chapter 6

Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy, Les Roberts, “Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey”

UNIT III: Presentation of Findings

Session 14: [Dec. 5]: Reporting, Dissemination and Ethics

Robson, C. *Real World Research*, Chapters 15 and 18

Elliott, J. Using Narratives in Social Research, Chapter 8

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Each student is responsible for meeting the course requirements indicated below. This includes active participation during class and preparation for the class activities through the course readings and written assignments. Also, late submissions for the written assignments may receive a lower grade.

1. Course Participation: 10% of course grade

Class participation represents an important activity of the course. Students are responsible for completing all the readings prior to class, preparing to engage in class discussion, and participating in in-class activities. Assessment will be based on both frequency and quality of participation; high quality participation deepens class discussion and offers evidence of significant engagement with the readings. If you need to miss a class, please notify the instructor as soon as you can.

2. Assignment #1: Research Design. 30% of course grade

For this assignment, you will provide a design for a possible real world research about a current conflict. The design will be a plan of activities for engaging in real world research, as this is defined in the book, Real World Research. For this plan, include the following elements:

1. Introduction--a basic introduction to the problem you are investigating. Within the conflict that you select for your design, identify the specific problem that your research will address. For example, the problem of your research could focus on learning more about the conflict actors—their beliefs, actions, or opinions about a certain aspect of the conflict. Alternatively, your research could seek to find information about those who are witnesses to the violence or those indirectly affected by the violence, such as children or the elderly.

2. Literature review. In conjunction with your problem statement, you will provide a fairly thorough review of the relevant literature and analyze what is known and not known about this problem. For example, if you want to determine the impact of conflict-related violence on eight year-old children, you should address the current literature on this topic. The goal here is to demonstrate your familiarity with the subject and to convince the readers of the necessity for studying the problem. An analysis of the current literature to show a) its strengths and deficiencies and b) the necessity for your research.
3. Purpose of your study. What exactly is the primary purpose of your investigation; what are you trying to accomplish through your study? The purpose needs to be specific, narrowly focused, small in scope and achievable assuming that you have limited resources. Do not select a broad purpose, such as the cause of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, since there is no single cause and no single conflict.
4. Research question or hypothesis that guides your investigation, including definitions of major concepts that you are using. Include an account of what related questions will not be addressed in your study.
5. Methodology. In this section you develop the methodology that you plan to deploy. The central factor here is specificity—what exactly are the data gathering activities/instruments and the data analysis methods.
 - a. For data gathering, you should provide a detailed plan of activities for what you plan to do regarding interviews, surveys, observations, focused reports, testimony, for example.
 - b. Regarding data analysis, you can select and develop one of the methods that we have discussed up to this point in the course: case study, ethnology, and grounded theory studies. If you want to use another method analysis, check with me first. You can select one of these, or another one if you feel that would be best.
6. The length will be between 10 and 12 pages double-spaced.
7. Due date: Session 7, Nov. 7.

3. Pilot Study. 30% of course grade

- a. A pilot is a kind of initial run of the planned research, like a small-scale experiment of the real thing, a segment of research activities.
- b. There are many kinds of pilots.
 - i. Some pilots focus on gathering data, for example (1) writing and then testing a questionnaire that you plan to use for sampling a group of people; (2) writing and then testing questions planned for interviews; (3) finding information through various search engines that is critical for your research, such as appearing in public media.
 - ii. Other pilots focus on the method of analysis that you plan, on a small scale. If you intend to use ethnographic analysis, then your pilot could include an analysis of one interview with someone. The same goes for any other method of analysis planned.
- c. Structure of pilot study: (a) introduction of the research you plan from assignment #2 above and the pilot that you did; (b) a summary of what you tested, such as a portion of the data that you gathered or that you analyzed; (c) the results

of your pilot study, specifying what went wrong or what went right about the pilot; and (d) a conclusion specifying whether and how, if at all, you would change your research plan developed earlier.

- d. Length: 5-7 pages
- e. Due date: Session 12, Nov. 26

4. Final exam: 30% of course grade

The questions for the final exam will be distributed in class on the last day, which is Dec.

5. Your answers are due one week later, Dec. 12, submitted by email.

HONOR POLICY

GMU is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

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. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct.

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA or APA format. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.