

CONF 610.001 -- Philosophy and Methods of Conflict Research
CRN: 10655

Monday, 7:20 pm - 10:00 pm
Arlington: Founders Hall 318

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Description

The importance of research for conflict analysis and practice 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 findings in their work, for example, when designing plans for a possible intervention and when evaluating an intervention's outcomes 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.

Objectives

- 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
- To 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.

Required Readings

Books:

The following books are available for purchase at the Arlington Campus Bookstore:

Punch, K., (2005). *Introduction to Social Research* (2nd edition.) SAGE Publications.

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

Articles:

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 from the menu.

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

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

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

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

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

Kathy Charmaz, "Discovering Chronic Illness: Using Grounded Theory"

Oren, N. Rothbart, D. and Korostelina, K. V. (2009) "Striking Civilian Targets during the Lebanon War—A Social Psychological Analysis of Israeli Decision Makers", In *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 15:3,281 — 303

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

Ibrahim Kira, "The Effects of Torture"

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

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”

Lars-Eric Petersen and Joerg Deitz, “Prejudice and enforcement in workplace homogeneity as explanations for workplace discrimination”.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 [January 28]: Introduction to Conflict Research

Week 2 [February 4]: Problems and questions in conducting qualitative research

Punch, K., *Introduction to Social Research*, Chapter 1

Robson, C. *Real World Research*, Chapter 1

Week 3 [February 11]: Alternative Approaches to Research

Punch, K., *Introduction to Social Research*, Chapter 2

Robson, C. *Real World Research*, Chapter 2

E. King, “Memory Controversies in Post Genocide Rwanda”

Week 4 [February 18]: Planning a Research Project: Flexible Design

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

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

Angela Veale, “Former Lord Resistance Army’s Child Soldier Abductees”.

Week 5 [February 25]: Planning a Research Project: Fixed Design

Punch, K., *Introduction to Social Research*, Chapter 3

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

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

Week 6 [March 4]: Planning a Research Project: Designs for Particular Purposes

Punch, K., *Introduction to Social Research*, Chapter 4

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

Week 7 [March 18]: Collecting Data: Surveys and Questionnaires

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

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

Week 8 [March 25]: Collecting Data: Interviews and Observations

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

Week 9 [April 1]: Analyzing Qualitative Data

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

Punch, K., *Introduction to Social Research*, Chapter 10

Week 10 [April 8]: Analyzing Qualitative Data

Inger Skjelsbaek, “Therapeutic Work with victims of Sexual Violence”

Oren, Neta, Rothbart, Daniel and Korostelina, Karina V. (2009) 'Striking Civilian Targets During the Lebanon War—A Social Psychological Analysis of Israeli Decision Makers', In *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 15:3, 281—303

Week 11 [April 15]: 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”

Week 12 [April 22]: Analyzing Quantitative Data

Punch, K., *Introduction to Social Research*, Chapter 7

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

Lars-Eric Petersen and Joerg Deitz, “Prejudice and enforcement in workplace homogeneity as explanations for workplace discrimination”.

Week 13 [April 29]: Reporting and Dissemination

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

Week 14 [May 6]: Summation

Course Requirements

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. Research Design: 30% of course grade

To write this paper you should select a particular area of interest to you. Research design paper will include:

- 1) *Statement of the problem and research question.* The first stage in your research design to development of your research problems and question. The following topics should be included:
 - a. A basic introduction to the problem you are investigating.
 - b. References to your literature review to show why this problem is significant.
 - c. The purpose of your study. What is your aim?
 - d. Research question or hypotheses that guide your investigation, including definitions of major concepts.

In conjunction with your problem statement you should conduct a fairly thorough review of the relevant literature and analyze what is known and not known about this problem, including the best methods for inquiry. The goal here is to demonstrate your familiarity with the subject and to convince the readers, myself and other class members, 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. Length: approximately 6 to 8 pages. We will work with your initial drafts of the problem statement and literature review in class and online prior to the final due date.

2) Research problem and question

This segment of the assignment is intended to complement the first part—statement of research problem and research question. With the research design, you will present in detail the qualitative or/and quantitative methods to be used to investigate the research question with particular attention given to the selection of data gathering methods and the method of analysis. Discuss why you chose particular methods as well as their relevance to your research question.

You also have to identify a sample for your research, method of sampling as well as possible ethical issues connected with your research and discuss how you are going to address them.

3) A description of the portion of the research design you intend to pilot for the purposes of producing your final Research Report.

4) Draft research instruments for your pilot study. Depending on your study design these may include interview questionnaires, survey instruments, focus group guides and questionnaires, observation protocols, and/or document collection protocols.

We will spend class time during each session to assist in the research design.

The length will be between 5 and 7 pages double spaced.

Due date : Week 5, February 25.

3. **Case study of two articles: 30% of course grade**

The primary purpose of this assignment is to provide a critical reflection on the methodologies deployed in any two of the articles assigned up to week 10 [April 8]. Due date is Week 11 [April 15].

Your critical reflection includes a summary of the primary elements of the methodology as conveyed in each article and a critical comparison, stressing the similarities and differences, among these elements.

In particular, your submission should be organized as follows: (a) For article #1 provide a summary of data gathering method(s), data analysis method, and theoretical underpinnings of the research project. (b) For article #2 provide a summary of data gathering method(s), data analysis method, and theoretical underpinnings of the research project. (c) In addition to your summaries of the elements of methodology that are explicitly presented in the articles, you should include some background information that explains the central concepts and that gives depth of understanding regarding the methodologies deployed in the articles. For example, if the authors claim to be using a narratological method, you should provide background information to explain what that means. (d) Finally, you should provide a critical comparison of the elements of methodology as presented, including an explicitly statement of the similarities and differences among these elements.

This submission should be 5-7 pages double spaced.

4. **Final exam: 30% of course grade**

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

6. Your answers are due one week later, May 15, 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.