

George Mason University

School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR)

CONF 642: Integration of Theory and Practice

Semester: Spring 2013
Class Time: Mondays, 7:20-10:00 pm
Location: Arlington Campus, Truland Building, Rm. 647
Instructor: Dennis J.D. Sandole, Ph.D.
tel: 703-250-4996
e-mail: dsandole@gmu.edu / Dsandole@aol.com

COURSE BACKGROUND

This course 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 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, as a *multi-discipline* and *applied-theory* field, not like other disciplines. Consequently, they felt that S-CAR should offer something at or near the end of the MSc. student's academic experience to help stimulate and guide the integrative process. Hence, this "course"!

Although, like other courses, "Integration of Theory and Practice" (CONF 642) includes lectures, readings, class presentations, class exercises, and a final paper, it is nevertheless unique because its primary subject matter comprises *all of the courses* students have taken by the time they enroll. As a *partial* framing of the totality of the CAR field, therefore, CONF 642 is *not* a "course" in the "normal" sense.

This presents us 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* over the course of the next 12 or so weeks.

CLASS DESCRIPTION

CONF 642 is the capstone course for S-CAR's MSc. students, designed to provide them, in *their final (or nearly 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 and conflict-handling *theory and practice*, with *research methods* facilitating the application of theory to practice and, via *evaluation research*, revealing the implications of practice for theory.

Students will weave together insights from their various courses into a coherent conceptual system, comprising:

- (1) **Theory [A]** on the *causes and conditions* of conflict initiation and escalation at *all* levels;
- (2) **Theory [B]** on hypothesized approaches and *processes* for dealing with conflicts at *all* levels;
- (3) **Practice** of actual approaches and *processes* for dealing with conflicts at *all* levels; and
- (4) **Research methods** for applying theory to practice and for feeding the results of practice back to theory.

The course will revolve around efforts to respond to the following core questions about the state of our knowledge on theory (A and B), research methods, and practice:

- (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:** To enroll, S-CAR MSc. students should be in their *final (or nearly final) semester*.

2. **Assessment:**

(a) One final paper is required in which students are asked to *integrate* required course readings (see below) into a *coherent whole*, comprising information relevant to the three (3) core questions on the state of our knowledge regarding theory (A and B), research methods, and practice (25-30 double-spaced pages); **due: Monday, 13 May 2013 (80% of final grade)**.

NOTE: Since the final paper is meant, among other things, to demonstrate that students have been in the course, it *should contain appropriate references to concepts, theories, approaches, processes, research methods and other insights mentioned in class and found in the required readings.* For further clarification -- including on the GMU Honor Code (e.g., avoiding any hint of plagiarism) -- students should feel free to consult with the instructor.

(b) Students will also present on, and discuss course readings, plus participate in class discussions on the status of the field and in a "Scenarios Development Exercise" (see below) **(20% of final grade)**.

Office Hours: After class (10:00-11:00 pm) and by appointment.

Withdrawal: The last day to drop the course without tuition penalty is 29 January 2013.

REQUIRED READINGS

- (1) Deutsch, Morton, Peter T. Coleman, and Eric C. Marcus (eds.). *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (2nd Edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.
- (2) Hewitt, J. Joseph, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Ted Robert Gurr. *Peace and Conflict 2012*. Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012.
- (3) Ramsbotham, Oliver, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflict* (3rd Edition). Cambridge (UK) and Malden (MA): Polity Press, 2012.
- (4) Sandole, Dennis J.D. "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
- (5) Sandole, Dennis J.D., Sean Byrne, Ingrid Sandole-Staroste, and Jessica Senehi (eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*. London and NY: Routledge, 2010.

Course Structure

- 21 Jan: **Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Holiday: No class.**
 28 Jan: **Introduction.**
- A. Student Expectations.
 - B. Course Overview.
 - C. 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 21st Century:
 1. The US: Likely to remain the most violent country in the industrialized world?
 2. Worldwide: Anticipated trends in *identity-based* and other conflicts; e.g., ethnic, racial, religious conflicts, terrorism ("Clashes of Civilization")?
 3. Environmental, Extreme Weather-related, and Scarce Resource Conflicts: "New frontiers" of conflict?

(Read: Hewitt, et al., *Peace and Conflict 2012.*)

- B. Three Core Questions:
 1. "What Do We Know?"
 2. "What Don't We Know?"
 3. "How Do We Find Out What We Don't Know?"
 - a. *Theory (A)*: Causes and Conditions of Conflict at all Levels.
 - b. *Theory (B)*: Hypothesized Approaches and Processes for Dealing with Conflicts at all Levels.
 - c. *Practice*: Actual Approaches and Processes for Dealing with Conflicts at all Levels.
 - d. *Research Methods* for Applying **Theory** to **Practice** and for Feeding the Results of **Practice** Back to **Theory**.

- 11 Feb: **Theory - Framework for Facilitating Responses to the Core Questions and for "Bringing It All Together."**

(Read: Sandole, "A Comprehensive Mapping of Conflict and Conflict Resolution.")

- 18 Feb: **Framework, continued.**
- 25 Feb: **Class Discussion:** What do we know? What don't we know? And how can we find out, re: Theory (A & B), Research Methods, and Practice?
- (Read: Deutsch, et al., *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution*)
- 4 Mar: **Class Discussion** of Deutsch, et al., continued.
- 11 Mar: Semester Break.**
- 18 Mar: **Class Discussion:** What do we know? What don't we know? And how can we find out, re: Theory (A & B), Research Methods, and Practice?
- (Read: Sandole, et al. *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*)
- 25 Mar: Class Discussion of Sandole, et al., continued.
- 1 Apr: **Class Discussion:** What do we know? What don't we know? And how can we find out, re: Theory (A & B), Research Methods, and Practice?
- (Read: Ramsbotham, et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*)
- 8 Apr: Class Discussion of Ramsbotham, et. al., continued.
- 15 Apr: **Process - 3PF Basis for Integrating All We Know: Scenarios Development:**
- A. Identity *Conflicts* (Current, Developing or Potential) that Could Worsen during the Next 10 Years (*Pillar 1*).
 - B. Explore Conflict Trajectories:
 1. Identify the Factors -- "*Drivers*" -- That Could Make Select Conflicts Worse (*Pillar 2*).
 2. Construct a *Scenario* Indicating How These Factors Could Combine to Make the Conflicts Worse (Worst-Case Scenario=Negative Trajectory) (*Pillar 2*).

C. Design a *Strategy* for Responding to these Factors ("Drivers") to Undermine their Potential Negative Impact on the Select Conflicts (*Pillar 3*).

22 Apr: **Scenario Exercise (continued): Scenario Development (Pillar 2).**

29 Apr: **Scenario Exercise (continued): Strategy Development (Pillar 3).**

6 May: **Course Review, Student Evaluations, and Termination.**

13 May: **Final Papers Due.**