

George Mason University

Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR)

CONF 642: Integration of Theory and Practice

Semester: Spring 2005
Class Time: Mondays, 4:30-7:10 pm
Location: Arlington Campus, Truland Building, Rm. 666A
Instructor: Dennis J.D. Sandole, Ph.D
tel: 703-993-1309
e-mail: dsandole@gmu.edu / Dsandole@aol.com

COURSE BACKGROUND

This course has not always existed at ICAR, although it came into existence fairly early in ICAR'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 has 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 ICAR 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 not like other disciplines, and was instead a *multi*-discipline and an applied-theory field. Consequently, they felt that ICAR should offer something at the end of students' studies to facilitate the integrative process.

Hence, this "course"! Although, like other courses, it includes lectures, readings, class presentations, class exercises, and written assignments, CONF 642 is nevertheless unique because its primary subject matter comprises all of the courses students have taken by the time they enroll. In that sense, therefore, CONF 642 is *not* a "course" in the "normal" sense.

This presents us -- students and faculty -- with a challenge: how to make this course "work"! This syllabus represents one *static* contribution to that process. The rest is up to us -- teacher and student -- and our *dynamics*: our respective weekly contributions, informed by appropriate preparation, plus our interactions, including reciprocal feedback, over the course of the next 15 weeks.

CLASS DESCRIPTION

CONF 642 is the capstone course for ICAR's MSc. students, designed to provide them, in their 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 resolution **theory** and **practice**, with **research methods** playing a pivotal role, facilitating the application of theory to practice and, via *evaluation research*, the implications of practice back to theory.

Accordingly, students will weave together into a coherent whole, bits and pieces from their various courses dealing with:

[a] **theory** [1] on the *causes* and *conditions* of conflict initiation and escalation at all levels;

[b] **theory** [2] on *approaches* and *processes* for dealing with conflicts at all levels;

[c] **practice** of *approaches* and *processes* for dealing with conflicts at all levels; and

[d] **research methods** for applying theory to practice and for feeding practice back to theory.

Among the means deemed potentially useful in this enterprise are efforts to respond to the following three (3) questions:

- (1) "*What do we know?*"
- (2) "*What don't we know?*" And
- (3) "*How can we find out what we don't know?*"

Other means include resources relevant to responding to these questions, such as:

-- select books on the overall field of conflict analysis and resolution (CAR) (e.g., *Cheldelin, Druckman, and Fast*; and *Jeong*);

-- interpretative reviews and class discussions of these readings;

-- exercises in *scenario development*; and

-- a final paper in which students attempt to **map** (and therefore **integrate**) the field of conflict analysis and resolution (CAR).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Prerequisites:** ICAR MSc. students should be in their *final semester*.

2. **Assessment:**

(a) For their *midterm paper*, students will complete *interpretative reviews of the two (2) assigned books*, comparing and contrasting them in their relevance to the three core questions of the course ("What do we know?", "What don't we know?", and "How can we find out what we don't know?") (20-25 double-spaced pages); **due: Monday, 28 March (35% of final grade)**.

(b) Students will also complete a *final paper* in which they "**map**" the field of conflict analysis and resolution (CAR), paying careful attention to existing knowledge generated by their courses, readings and other experiences dealing with *theory (1): causes and conditions; theory (2): approaches and processes; research methods; and practice (25-30 double-spaced pages)*; **due: Monday, 9 May (45% of final grade)**.

Students will also participate in class discussions of the status of the field and of the readings, and in *scenario development* exercises (see below) (**20% of final grade**).

Office Hours: After class (7:20-8:00 pm) and by appointment.

Withdrawal: The last day to drop the course without dean's permission is 25 February 2005.

REQUIRED READINGS

In addition to readings associated with other courses that may be relevant, the readings assigned for this course are:

- (1) Cheldelin, Sandra, Daniel Druckman, and Larissa Fast (eds.). *Conflict: From Analysis to Intervention*. London and New York: Continuum, 2003.
- (2) Jeong, Howon. *Peace and Conflict Studies: An Introduction*. Aldershot (England) and Burlington (Vermont): Ashgate, 2000.

Course Structure

- 24 Jan: **Introduction.**
- A. Student Expectations.
 - B. Course Overview.
 - C. Assignments for Presentations on Course Readings (approximately half of class for Cheldelin, et al., and half for Jeong).
- 31 Jan: **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 Degradation and Resource Scarcities, plus Natural Disasters (e.g., tsunamis): "New frontiers" of conflict?
 - B. The Moral and Practical Need to "Do the Right Thing": the *Raison d'etre* for *Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (CAR).
- 7 Feb: **Initial Responses to the Three Core Questions:**
- 14 Feb:
- A. "What Do We Know?"
 - B. "What Don't We Know?"
 - C. "How Do We Find Out What We Don't Know?"
 - 1. *Theory (1)*: Causes and Conditions of Conflict at All Levels.
 - 2. *Theory (2)*: Approaches and Processes for Dealing with Conflicts at All Levels.
 - 3. *Practice* of Approaches and Processes for Dealing with Conflicts at All Levels.
 - 4. *Research Methods* for Applying **Theory** to **Practice** and for Feeding the Results of Practice Back to Theory.
- 21 Feb: **Theory -- Frameworks for Facilitating Further Responses to the Core Questions and for "Bringing It All Together."**
(Read Sandole [Ch. 3] in Cheldelin, et al, 2003.)
- 28 Feb: **Process -- Scenarios Development: Core Elements.**
- A. Identity a *Conflict* (Current, Developing or Potential) that Could Worsen or Improve during the Next 10 Years or So.

- B. Explore *Conflict Trajectories*:
1. Identify the Factors -- "*Drivers*" -- that Could Make the Conflict Worse or Better (*Pillar 2*).
 2. Construct a *Scenario* Indicating How these Factors Could *Combine* to Make the Conflict Worse (Worst-Case Scenario=*Negative Trajectory*) or Better (Best-Case Scenario=*Positive Trajectory*) (*Pillar 2*).
- C. Design a *Strategy* for Responding to these Factors ("*Drivers*") to Either Undermine their Potential Negative Impact or Enhance their Positive Impact on the Conflict over Time (*Pillar 3*).

- 7 Mar: **Class Discussion:** What do we know? What don't we know? And how can we find out from Cheldelin, et. al., *Conflict: From Analysis to Intervention*?
- 14 Mar: **Semester Break.**
- 21 Mar: **Scenario Exercise.** Option: "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict."
- 28 Mar: **Class Discussion:** What do we know? What don't we know? And how can we find out from Jeong, *Peace and Conflict Studies: An Introduction*?
- 28 Mar: **Midterm Papers Due.**
- 4 Apr: **Scenario Exercise.** Option: "Clash of Civilizations."
- 11 Apr: **The Three Core Questions Revisited.**
- A. "What Do We Know?": **Any Change?**
 - B. "What Don't We Know?": **Any Change?**
 - C. "How Can We Find Out?": **Any Change?**
 1. *Theory (1):* Causes and Conditions of Conflict at All Levels.
 2. *Theory (2):* Approaches and Processes for Dealing with Conflicts at All Levels.
 3. *Practice* of Approaches and Processes for Dealing with Conflicts at All Levels.
 4. *Research Methods* for Applying **Theory** to **Practice** and Results of Practice Back to Theory. And, most importantly:
- 18 Apr: **Considering the Design of an Ideal MSc. Curriculum.**
- 25 Apr: **Course Wrap-up and Evaluations.**
- 9 May: **Final Papers Due.**