

George Mason University

Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR)

CONF 642: Integration of Theory and Practice

Semester: Spring 2006
Class Time: Wednesdays, 7:20-10:00 pm
Location: Arlington Campus, Truland Building, Rm. 333A
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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 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. CONF 642 is *not*, therefore, a "course" in the "normal" sense.

This presents us -- students and faculty -- 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*: our respective weekly contributions, informed by appropriate preparation, plus our interactions, including reciprocal feedback, over the course of the next 12 or so weeks.

CLASS DESCRIPTION

Accordingly, 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 for theory.

Students will weave together into a coherent system "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 hypothesized approaches and processes for dealing with conflicts at *all* levels;

(c) **Practice** of actual approaches and processes for dealing with conflicts at all levels; and

(d) **Research methods** for applying theory to practice and 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?"

These three questions will, therefore, constitute the *core questions of the course*.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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

2. **Assessment:**

(a) For their *midterm papers*, students will be invited to *integrate* the course readings into a *coherent whole*, 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?") (25-30 double-spaced pages); **due: Wednesday, 29 March (50% of final grade)**.

(b) Students will also complete a *final paper* in which they will be invited to design the "ideal" MSc. Program in Conflict Analysis and Resolution that they wished they had experienced at ICAR (15-20 double-spaced pages); **due: Wednesday, 26 April (30% of final grade)**.

Students will also participate in class discussions of the

status of the field, readings and in at least one *scenario 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 academic liability is 28 February 2006.

REQUIRED READINGS

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.

(3) Miall, Hugh, Oliver Ramsbotham, and Tom Woodhouse. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution (2nd Edition)*. Cambridge (UK) and Malden (Massachusetts): Polity Press, 2005.

Course Structure

25 Jan: **Introduction.**

- A. Student Expectations.
- B. Course Overview.
- C. Assignments for Presentations on Course Readings (approximately a 3rd of the class for Cheldelin, et al., a 3rd for Jeong, and a 3rd for Miall, et al.).

1 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 Degradation and Resource Scarcities, plus Natural Disasters (e.g., tsunamis, hurricanes, and mudslides): "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).

- 8 Feb: **Theory - The 3PF Framework for Facilitating Further Responses to the Core Questions and for "Bringing It All Together."**
(Read Sandole [Ch. 3] in Cheldelin, et al, 2003.)
- 15 Feb: **The Three Core Questions:**
- 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):* Hypothesized Approaches and Processes for Dealing with Conflicts at All Levels.
 3. *Practice:* Actual 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.
- 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?*
- 22 Feb: **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?*
- 1 Mar: **Class Discussion:** What do we know? What don't we know? And how can we find out from Miall, et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution?*
- 8 Mar: **Guest Lecture.**
- 15 Mar: **Semester Break.**
- 22 Mar: **Guest Lecture.**
- 29 Mar: **Process -- Scenarios Development: Core Elements.**
- A. Identify a *Conflict* (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 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 (*Pillar 3*).

29 Mar: Midterm Papers Due.

5 Apr: **Scenario Exercise.** Option: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.

12 Apr: **Designing an Ideal MSc. Curriculum.**

19 Apr: **Designing an Ideal MSc. Curriculum (continued).**

26 Apr: **Final Papers Due.**