Philosophy and Methods of Conflict Research
CONF 610 Section 003, Fall 2006
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
George Mason University

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with purpose.
-Zora Neale Hurston-

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:00-5:00 p.m. and by appointment

Course time and location: Tuesdays, 7:20-10:00 p.m., Arlington Campus 109

Course Description
This course introduces students to the philosophies behind social science research and the methods for conducting research in the field of conflict resolution. The concepts we will cover include the identification of valid knowledge (*epistemology*), the nature of the world and how we view the causes of conflicts (*ontology*), and the means (*methodology*) by which we conduct research to test existing knowledge or generate new knowledge about conflicts and conflict resolution.

This course provides an overview of the research process and asks that you acquire hands-on experience with that process. Accordingly we will focus on the:
1) identification of research problems associated with particular conflict situations.
2) selection of appropriate research methods for use in exploring the problem at hand.
3) design of effective research projects.

Course Objectives
- Develop familiarity with research concepts and tools to use in examining and analyzing conflict and conflict resolution and be able to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of different methods.

- Demonstrate ability to frame and communicate a feasible research question pertinent to conflict resolution and design research to answer it.

- Improved ability to critically evaluate research, your own and that of other social scientists.

- Gain skills in locating and assessing research information relevant to conflict and conflict management from different academic disciplines.

- Understand forms of research for multiple contexts, including academic, organizational, and community contexts and develop awareness of the expectations of different audiences and applications.

- Understand the ethical implications of research.

Course Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

Active engagement: Research skills, like any other skills, can best be acquired through practice, reflection and application. Therefore students will learn by doing in all aspects of the course. Most of our time will be divided between discussion, hands-on exercises and peer feedback on research proposals. I expect you to have studied the required readings prior to class. Take time to digest the new methods and ideas before you come to class and be prepared to apply them or to ask about points that remain unclear. Each week we will spend some time hearing from class members on the development of your research project. Perhaps the most important part of the course is this process of creating a research community that shares ideas, experiences, expertise, challenges, and reflective thought. Everyone must come to class prepared to offer constructive feedback and suggestions. Since these assignments build on each other, you will be able to leverage your work and your understanding most effectively by completing and reflecting on each piece as assigned. Expect this course to have a moderate to heavy workload. Ask questions and raise concerns. If something is unclear or is not working effectively for you educationally, please tell me. I am easily reachable by e-mail and can usually respond promptly.

Missed classes: As this class is taught in a seminar/discussion format, its success depends on active and sustained participation by all those in the course. The more each person participates, the more learning will take place for everyone. If you miss a class, you should take responsibility for finding out what you missed and get the notes from a colleague. You will be asked to evaluate your own participation in and preparedness for class at the end of the semester.

Due dates: You are responsible for completing assignments on time. Late assignments may be penalized.

Assistance: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

The ability to write papers that are clear, analytical and your own work is essential. If you aren't already good at this, you can learn. The Writing Center is available to all Mason students and offers online and individual consultations as well as workshops and mini-courses.

Academic integrity: You are responsible for knowing, understanding, and following Mason's Honor Code, which can be found at: http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#Anchor12. Be sure that all work submitted is your own and that you use sources appropriately. I strongly recommend that you review requirements regarding use and citation of sources prior to submitting your final work.

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Of special concern is plagiarism, both intentional and inadvertent. The following passage from the English Department at Mason offers some basic guidelines:

> Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving that person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books and articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in an academic setting. Student writers are often confused as to what should be cited. Some think that only direct quotations need to be credited. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions for this include factual information which can be obtained from a variety of sources, the writers' own insights or findings from their own field research, and what has been termed common knowledge. What constitutes common knowledge can sometimes be precarious; what is common knowledge for one audience may not be so for another. In such situations, it is helpful, to keep the reader in mind and to think of citations as being "reader friendly." In other words, writers provide a citation for any piece of information that they think their readers might want to investigate further. Not only is this attitude considerate of readers, it will almost certainly ensure that writers will never be guilty of plagiarism.

Incompletes: Per GMU policy, incomplete grades will not be granted save in cases of personal or immediate family illness or emergency.

Assignments: All assignments should be double-spaced and use standard Times New Roman-12pt font. Consistent use of a standardized citation format is required.

Course Readings

We will be using the following required texts:

Druckman, Daniel. (2005) *Doing research: Methods of inquiry for conflict analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Gray, David E. (2004) *Doing research in the real world*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Highly recommended is the following text; it provides a more complete discussion of the construction of a qualitative research proposal:

Marshall, Catharine and Rossman, Gretchen. (2006) *Designing qualitative research, 5th edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

This course will use a class website. Additional required readings and supplemental materials will be available on the class website and several assignments will utilize the discussion section for posting and feedback. All students are responsible for downloading and reading assignments *before* they are discussed in class. The course website can be accessed by directing your browser to http://webct41.gmu.edu

Course Requirements

Participation: (10%) Attendance is extremely important as the course is interactive and elicitive in nature. Participation is critical to student learning; students will be expected to carry the discussion and engage each other in discussions about the assigned readings and research proposals. You can also participate by asking questions, circulating emails, organizing study groups, exchanging writing or introducing new ideas and resources.

Problem Statement and Literature Review: (30%) The first steps toward the development of your research proposal require identifying an area of investigation and the literature which informs your topic. The problem statement should contain:

- A basic introduction to the problem you are investigating.
- References to your literature review to show why this problem is significant.
- The purpose of your study. What is your aim?
- Questions or hypotheses that guide your investigation.

In conjunction with your problem statement you should conduct a fairly thorough review of the relevant literature and write a paper analyzing what is known and not known about this problem. 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. The literature review should contain:

- A basic definition of your problem or question.
- An overview of the arguments in the field regarding the problem or question.
- An analysis of the current literature to show a) its strengths and deficiencies and b) the necessity for your research.

Length: approximately 10 to 15 pages. We will work with your initial drafts of the problem statement and literature review in class prior to the final due date. Due: October 24th.

Draft Research Design: (20%) This assignment is a 4 to 5 page paper referring to your Research Question and Literature Review, but focusing on your overall research design and the methods you plan to use to collect and analyze data. The draft research design should contain:

- A brief reintroduction of your problem, question and a clear statement of your arguments and hypotheses.
- An overview of your research design, including the collection and analyses methods you intend to use.
- Your sampling scheme or where you plan to obtain your data.
- A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of your design and data collection; with your argument as to how you plan to address any weaknesses.
- A description of the portion of the research design you intend to pilot for the purposes of producing your final Research Report

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<u>Research Proposal and Presentation</u>: (40%) The culminating assignment for this course will be a research proposal submitted as though you were applying for funding from a particular agency. There is no word limitation on this paper, but I will find it difficult to read papers that are too lengthy—recommended length is 20 to 25 pages. The paper should include elements from all of the previous assignments—corrected and edited as necessary—as well as a discussion of your pilot data collection. Elements that should be included:

- Your revised Problem Statement with arguments or hypotheses.
- A reduced version of your Literature Review focusing on highlights, analyses and why your research is necessary.
- Your revised research design.
- 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.
- A description of the pilot research you performed
- An analysis of the pilot research you performed: how you did it, what you learned and how it has affected your research design (confirming it, requiring modifications, etc.)
- A work plan including a timeline for completion of a final study.
- A resources required section with categories—but not monetary amounts.
- Some indication of your final product and how you plan to disseminate it.

As part of this assignment, you will do an oral presentation on your research proposal, length to be determined by the number of students in the class. This will take place before you turn in your final paper, so you can use this opportunity to fine tune your work and incorporate feedback. I suggest that you attempt to use some sort of presentation software but this is not necessary. I will make a PC laptop available for those who do not wish to bring one.

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<u>**Initial Class Schedule and Assignments**</u>
(Note: This schedule may be modified during the semester)
All assignments are due at the **beginning** of class

August 29:
Introduction to the course, administrative matters, conflict interests, research background.

    To do: Brainstorm ideas and problems in conflict and research (in class)

September 5:
Social science research and the multidisciplinary nature of conflict studies. Overview of research approaches: inductive and deductive.

Reading:	Gray, Chapters 1 and 2.
	Druckman, Chapter 1
	Recommended: Marshall & Rossman, Chapter 1.
To Do:	Locate and bring to class an article reporting conflict research results. Be prepared to discuss your article.

September 12:
Problems & questions in conflict analysis & resolution. Developing questions; designing research. Concept mapping.

Reading:	Gray, Ch. 3
	Druckman, Chapter 2
	Research example: TBA
	Recommended: Marshall & Rossman, Chapters 2 and 3.

To do: Initial Problem Identification Due. Your first assignment will be to draft 1 to 3 pages (200-700 words) detailing a problem in conflict resolution that you feel needs to be addressed with a research project. This assignment will lead to your literature review and research question, so you should try to think of something that interests you, that you have some knowledge about and that is researchable. Post to class web page prior to the next class and respond with feedback to at least two classmates.

September 19:
Turning questions into projects. Locating background material and understanding what you've found. Research Design I: Experiments.

Reading:	Gray, Chapter 4
	Druckman, Chapter 3
	Research example: TBA

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September 26:
Research design II: Surveys & Case Studies.

      Reading: Gray, Chapters 5 and 6
                        Druckman, Chapters 5, 6 and 7
                        Research example: TBA

October 3:
Research design III: Interpretive Studies.

      Reading: Druckman & Seligmann, Chapters 8 and 10
                        Research example: TBA

      To do: Literature review & problem statement due.

October 10:   No class, Columbus Day weekend. Monday classes held on Tuesday.

October 17:
Research Design IV: Evaluation research and action research.

      Reading: Gray, Chapters 7 and 15
                        Druckman, Chapters 11 and 12
                        Research example: Rothman, Jay. (1997) "Action evaluation and conflict resolution training: theory, method and case study."

October 24:
Data collection: Questionnaires, Documents & Interviewing. Primary and secondary sources.

      Reading: Gray, Chapters 8 and 9
                  Druckman, Chapter 9
                  Research example: TBA
                  Recommended: Marshall & Rossman, Chapter 4

October 31:
Research ethics and principles. Standards of quality.

      Reading: TBA
                        Research example: TBA

      To do: Draft research design due, for discussion and peer review in class.

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November 7:
Collecting data continued. Analyzing data: quantitative approaches.

      Reading: Gray, Chapters 12 and 13
                    Recommended: Marshall & Rossman, Chapter 5

      To do: Peer review of instruments for pilot

November 14:
Analyzing data continued: qualitative approaches. Reporting on research.

      Reading: Gray, Chapter 14
                  Research example: TBA

November 21:
Issues in conflict analysis and resolution research revisited: audiences, context, researcher role. Mapping the field.

      Reading: Research example: TBA

November 28:
Presentations and discussion.

December 5:
Presentations, discussion and wrap-up of the semester. Evaluations.

December 12:
Research Report due by 5:30 p.m.

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