

SCHOOL FOR CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND RESOLUTION (S-CAR)
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Philosophy and Methods of Conflict Research (CONF 610)

Semester: Spring 2016
Class Time: Thursday, 4:30 - 7:10 pm
Location: Arlington Campus, Founders Hall, Rm. 465
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Course Abstract

This course deals with the **design and conduct** of **conflict research**. The underlying assumption is that we first have to know something about a particular conflict -- i.e., we have to first *analyze* it -- before we can attempt to explore options for doing something about it, e.g., to either *prevent, manage, settle, resolve, and/or transform* it.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

CONF 610 is the **Research Methods** course that is required of all students enrolled in the Master's Program at GMU's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR). As such, it addresses methodologies for the *design and implementation* of research on the **causes** of, and optimal **responses** to *complex, intractable, often violent conflicts* within and between states.

Embedded in the *Philosophy of Science*, the course deals with the following broad questions:

. **Ontology:** What is the "nature" of the world about which we try to obtain knowledge? In our case, to what extent are conflicts in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Chechnya, Columbia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), France, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Ivory Coast, Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, U.S., Yemen, Zimbabwe, or elsewhere reflective of *cultural, economic, historical, identity, political, religious, social, and/or other dimensions?*

. **Epistemology:** What constitutes "valid" *knowledge* for any particular conflict system? How do we determine the "**facts**" about any conflict and what are the difficulties involved in

their acquisition?

. **Methodology:** How do we conduct research into aspects of *complex conflicts* in order to test existing and/or generate new knowledge about them?

These philosophical issues -- *what* we perceive, *why* and *how* we perceive "it" - can impact what we deal with subsequently, such as:

- . *Identifying research problems* associated with particular conflict systems;
- . *Selecting research methods* which may be relevant to a better understanding of, and response to those problems; as well as
- . Designing particular *interventions* into those conflicts.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

(1) Familiarize students of conflict analysis and resolution (CAR) with what research into complex conflicts is all about;

(2) Enable students to better understand and utilize the knowledge they uncover in the research-based conflict/conflict resolution literature; and

(3) Encourage students to undertake research into conflict and conflict resolution themselves, as a basis for preventing, managing, settling, resolving, and/or transforming protracted, violent conflict systems at the *intra-* and *inter-*state levels.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Prerequisites:** Acceptance into S-CAR's MSc. or Ph.D. program and successful completion of either CONF 501 or 801, or permission of the instructor.

2. **Class Format:** Classes will follow an *interactive seminar format*. Hence, class attendance, participation, and the *completion of relevant readings prior to class* are required.

3. **Assessment:** A *mid-term paper*, worth **40% of the final grade**, will be due on 17 March 2016. A *final research design/pilot study*, representing **50% of the final grade**, will be due on 12 May 2016.

Student participation will be worth **10% of the final grade**. [Overall in-class participation will determine whether a "borderline" final grade of, for example, B+/A- remains in the B or A category.]

(a) The **midterm paper** (10-15 double-spaced pages) will be a response to the statement and corresponding question, "*Truth like beauty lies in the eye of the beholder: Implications for conflict parties, conflict analysts and conflict resolvers?*"

(b) The **final paper** (15-20 double-spaced pages) will be a combined *research design/pilot study* in which:

[1] Each student will craft a *research design*; i.e.,

-- Identify and discuss *WHAT* she or he **would like to study** for a MSc. thesis or other project, if given the chance, time, and other resources;

-- *WHY* he or she would want to study it, spelling out its importance or significance for the CAR field, the community, etc.; and

-- *HOW* she or he would study it, articulating and discussing the concepts, theories, approaches and research methods relevant to solving the problem implied in the "what." And then:

[2] Each student will conduct a *pilot study*: "operationalize" a part of the research design by **actually studying a very small scale version of it**, not just to acquire experience in data generation, collection, processing and analysis, but also to explore the viability ("*do-ability*") of the more comprehensive research design.

For example, if one's *research design* calls for interviewing Palestinians and Israelis about the prospects for "positive peace" in the Middle East, rather than interview hundreds of members of each "identity group," as might be called for in a funded, "statistically representative" version of the project, the student might go to the Johnson Center on the main GMU campus, locate five Palestinian and five Israeli/Jewish GMU students and then interview them.

Again, the objective of the *pilot study* is to provide students with an opportunity to actually apply some of the ideas and techniques they would otherwise only read and hear about in class; i.e., to go beyond their research designs and, on a small scale, actually conduct systematic research into complex conflicts and their constructive handling.

NOTE: Since the mid-term and final papers are meant, among other things, to demonstrate that students have been in the course, *the two papers should contain appropriate references to course concepts and the corresponding 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.

(c) **Active Student participation.** Students will be given opportunities to lead discussions on the required course readings.

Office Hours: Thursdays, immediately following each class and by appointment.

Withdrawal: The last day to drop the course without any penalty is 26 January 2016.

REQUIRED READINGS

(1) Brewer, John and Albert Hunter (2006). *Foundations of Multimethod Research: Synthesizing Styles.* Thousand Oaks (California) and London: Sage Publications.

(2) Creswell, John W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd Edition). Los Angeles and London: SAGE

(3) Backer, David A., Jonathan Wilkenfeld and Paul K. Huth (2014). *Peace and Conflict 2014.* Boulder (Colorado): Paradigm Publishers.

(4) Kuhn, Thomas S. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(5) Moses, Jonathon W., and Torbjørn L. Knutsen (2007). *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research.* Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire (UK) and New York: Palgrave Macmillan

(6) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (1999). *Capturing the Complexity of Conflict: Dealing with Violent Ethnic Conflict in the Post-Cold War Era.* London and New York: Pinter/Cassell [Continuum International].

(7) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (2002). "Virulent Ethnocentrism: A Major Challenge for Transformational Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in the Post-Cold War Era." *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol.

1, No. 4, pp. 4-27. (Go to Google, type in my name and "virulent ethnocentrism" and various sites for the article will appear.)

(8) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (2007). *Peace and Security in the Postmodern World: The OSCE and Conflict Resolution*. New York and London: Routledge.

(9) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (2009). "Critical Systemic Inquiry (CSI) in Conflict Analysis and Resolution: The Essential Bridge between Theory and Practice." In *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (Dennis J.D. Sandole, Sean Byrne, Ingrid Sandole-Staroste, and Jessica Senehi, eds.). London and New York: Routledge. (Already provided by instructor.)

(10) Sriram, Chandra Lekha, John C. King, Julie A. Mertus, Olga Martin-Ortega, and Johanna Herman (2009). *Surviving Field Research: Working in Violent and Difficult Situations*. London and NY: Routledge.

(11) Wilkinson, Richard and Kate Pickett (2009). *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Press.

COURSE STRUCTURE

21 Jan I. Introduction.

- A. Introductions (including Conflict-Relevant Backgrounds).
- B. Expectations.
- C. Preferred Research Domains.
- D. Course Overview.

28 Jan/ 4 Feb/ 11 Feb II. The Utility of Systematic Research in Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CAR)

- A. Indicators of Major Conflict-Relevant Trends Worldwide [Conflict as *Symptoms*].
 - 1. Armed Conflict.
 - 2. Sexual Violence.
 - 3. Democratization.
 - 4. Peacebuilding.
 - 5. Terrorism.

READ: Backer, et al., 2014.

B. Conducting Research in the "Real World," including Violent Conflict Settings, as a Participant [Conflict as *Challenged Relationships*].

READ: Sandole, 2007, Ch. 1.
Sriram, et al., 2009.

C. Conducting Research in the "Real World" as an Observer [Conflict as Deep-Rooted Causes and Conditions].

READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 1.
Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009.

18 Feb/
25 Feb

III. Uncovering the Drivers of Violent Conflict.

A. "Mapping" Potential Causes and Conditions.

1. *3 Levels of Conflict Reality.*
2. *3 Pillar Framework of Conflict and Conflict Resolution (3PF).*

READ: Sandole, 2007, Ch. 2;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 6.

B. Observer vs. Participant in Exploring the Origins and Meaning of Actor Behavior.

1. *Explanation ("Erklären"):* "Action Meaning".
2. *Understanding ("Verstehen"):* "Act Meaning".

READ: Moses and Knutsen, 2007.

How can we -- *in this course* -- do our own research to either "explain" or "understand" conflict phenomena? (**Mnemonic #1: P[PT²DT].**)

3 Mar

IV. Impact on Decisionmaking Behavior of Researchers', Practitioners', and Disputants' Worldviews: Paradigms.

(P)

- A. Normal Science.
- B. Anomalies.

1. *Cognitive Blindness.*

2. *Cognitive Resistance*.
3. *Evaluative-Affective Resistance (EAR) 1*.
4. *Evaluative-Affective Resistance (EAR) 2*.

C. Crisis: Breaking the "Paradigmatic Deadlock".

D. Clashing Paradigms: *Realpolitik* ["Hard Power"] vs. *Idealpolitik* ["Soft Power"].

E. Scientific Revolutions.

READ: Kuhn, 1996;
Sandole, 1999, pp. 109-113;
Sandole, 2002.

10 Mar: **NO CLASS (MID-SEMESTER BREAK).**

17 Mar: **MID-TERM PAPERS DUE.**

17 Mar **V. Constructing the Research Design.**

A. Research Design Overview (**Mnemonic #2**).

1. **What?**
2. **Why?**
3. **How?**

B. Problem in Need of Solution: The "**What**" of Research. (P)

1. The General Problem Area.
2. The Specific Problem.
 - a) Units and Levels of Analysis.
 - b) Accessibility to Research.
 - c) Ethical Considerations.

C. Reasons Underlying Selection (Significance of the Problem): The "**Why**" of Research.

1. Theoretical Significance.
2. Practical Significance.

READ: Creswell, Chs. 1-6;
Review Sandole, 1999, Ch. 1;
Review Sandole, 2007, Ch. 1;
Sandole, 2009 (Provided by Instructor).

24 Mar

D. Researching the Problem: The "How" of Research.

E. Type of Study. (T)

1. Exploratory.
2. Descriptive.
3. Causal.

F. Theoretical Setting. (T)

1. Concepts.
2. Hypotheses.
3. Models.
4. Theories.

READ: Creswell, Ch. 7;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 2 (Review Ch. 6);
Review Sandole, 2007, Ch. 2.

31 Mar

G. Operational Setting: Data Sources. (D)

1. Library/Archival Setting.
2. Natural Setting.

- a) Surveys (Sampling).
- b) Field Studies.
- c) Field Experiments.

3. Artificial Setting.

- a) Laboratory Experiments.
- b) Simulation.

4. "Mixed Methods" (*Triangulation*)

READ: Brewer and Hunter, 2006;
Creswell, Chs. 8-10;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 3 and App. A;
Sandole, 2007, Ch. 4.

7 Apr

H. Data Collection.

1. Other-Generated (Existing) Data.

- a) Personal Documents.
- b) Statistical Records.
- c) Mass Communications.

d) Scholarly/Literary/Pedagogical Works.

2. Self-Generated Data.

- a) Interviews.
- b) Questionnaires.
- c) Observation.

READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 and App. B;
Sandole, 2007, Chs. 5-9.

14 Apr

I. Data "Measurement" and Processing.

1. Translating Data into Indicators.

- a) *Nominal Level* of Measurement.
 - **Coding** (Content Analysis, 1).
 - Computation of **Modes** and **Ranges**.
- b) *Ordinal Level* of Measurement.
 - **Scaling** (Content Analysis, 2).
 - Computation of **Medians** and **Quartile Deviations**.
- c) *Interval/Ratio* Levels of Measurement.
 - Computation of **Means** and **Standard Deviations**.
 - Standardization.
 - Transformation.

2. *Reliability* and *Validity* of Indicators.

READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 (cont'd) and
App. C;
Sandole, 2007 (cont'd);
Review Backer, et al.

J. Data Analysis.

- 1. Trends.
- 2. Differences.
- 3. Relationships.

- a) Correlation.
- b) Regression.

READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 (cont'd);
Sandole, 2007 (cont'd);
Review Backer, et al. (cont'd).

21 Apr

K. Validating and Interpreting the Results.

1. Norms of Validation.
 - a) Correspondence.
 - b) Pragmatic.
 - c) Coherence.
2. Statistical Significance.
3. The *Verification - Falsification* Controversy.
4. The Theoretical Setting Revisited. (T)

READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 5-8 and App. D;
Sandole, 2007, Ch. 10.
Review Kuhn, Ch. 12.

**28 Apr/
5 May** **VI. Examples of Applied Research (Continued).**

REVIEW: Sandole, 1999.
Sandole, 2007.
Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009.
Sriram, et al., 2009.

VII. Conclusion.

12 May **RESEARCH DESIGNS/PILOT STUDIES DUE.**