

CONF 301:001
Research and Inquiry in Conflict Resolution
TR 10:30 -11:45
Innovation Hall 207

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Office Hours
TR 11:45-12:45
Robinson Hall B room 365

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The goal of conflict research is to answer certain questions about protracted conflicts. Why do conflicts occur? How do they evolve? What are the social and/or political factors that caused them? Who is affected by the resulting negativities? And how can conflicts be prevented, or, if not prevented then at least have their harmful effects reduced in severity? Of course, the nature of protracted conflicts makes these questions very difficult to answer. Protracted conflicts are extremely complex, difficult to understand fully, and virtually impossible to predict. These problems create special challenges for researchers. Brief descriptions are always inadequate, and explanations that rely on a single cause are shallow. Yet, the importance of answering these questions cannot be overstressed. So, how is this done?

This course examines the kinds of activities and skills needed for attaining knowledge of the causes, pre-conditions, and characteristic of conflicts of various sorts. Such knowledge is acquired by engaging in research activities: identifying the problems/questions that motivate the researchers, planning on the ways to gather information, and determining the meaning of the information. No single method can serve the needs of all researchers, for all kinds of conflict. The necessity of multiple methods, to reveals the complexity of every conflict, is obvious.

This course is organized around themes that are particularly central to our field. Throughout the semester, we will show how questions about the character of a particular conflict merge with decisions about methodology, and that methodology is learned through a critical reflection on case studies. We will also engage in “do it yourself” activities to practice the learned skills.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Engage in critical reflection of the goals of research and inquiry
- Integrate research with theory and practice
- Apply the methods of quantitative research to cases of protracted conflict.
- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative research.
- Apply the methods of qualitative research to cases of protracted conflict.
- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of methods of qualitative research.
- Examine the normative underpinnings of both qualitative research and quantitative research.

TEXTS

Keith F. Punch, Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches. Second Edition. Sage Publications. 2005. ISBN 10 0-7619-4417-6 (pbk) [ISR]

Charles C. Ragin, Constructing Social Research. Pine Forge Press. 1994. ISBN: 0-8039-9021-9 (paper) [CSR]

Articles/book chapters:

#1 Rambotham, et. al., “Statistics of Deadly Quarrels” in Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Chapter 3, pp. 55-77.

#2 Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy, Les Roberts, “Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey.”

#3 General Guide/Template for a Research Design or Proposal

#4 Ibrahim A. Kira, et. al., “The Effects of Torture: Two Community Studies” Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 12 (3): 205-228.

#5 Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gleditsch, “Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths” European Journal of Population (2005) 21: 145–166

#6 Inger Skjelsbaek, “Therapeutic Work with victim of sexual violence” Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 12 (2): 93-118.

#7 Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural Symbol” in The Interpretation of Cultures, pp. 87-125.

#8 Tal Litvak-Hirsch, et. al., “Whose House is this? Dilemmas of Identity Construction in the Israeli-Palestinian Context” Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 9 (2): 127-148.

#9 Angel Veale and Aki Stavrou, “Former Lord’s Resistance Army Child Soldier Abductees: Explorations of identity in Reintegration and Reconciliation” Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 13(3): 273-292.

#10 Winnifred R. Louis, “Intergroup Positioning and Power,” in Fathali M. Moghaddam, Rom Harré, and Naomi Lee, eds., Global Conflict Resolution through Positioning Analysis, pp. 21-40.

#11 Ciaran Benson, “The Unthinkable boundaries of self: the role of negative emotional boundaries for the formation, maintenance, and transformation of identities,” in Rom Harré and Fathali Moghaddam, eds., The Self and Others, pp. 61-84.

#12 Debra Kaminer, “Forgiveness Attitudes of Truth Commission Deponents: Relation to Commission Response During Testimony” Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 12(2): 175-187.

Teaching Technology: Blackboard

We use Blackboard for the following:

Syllabus

Links to Ereserve articles

courses.gmu.edu
gmU.blackboard.com

username:
password: known

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Sept. 1: Introduction to Course

Unit I. Research on Violent Conflicts

Sept. 3 and Sept. 8: The causes, conditions and characteristics of violent conflicts

Rambotham, et. al., "Statistics of Deadly Quarrels" in Contemporary Conflict Resolution,
Chapter 3

Ragin, "What is Social Research?" Chapter 1 in CSR.

Punch, "Some Central Issues" Chapter 2 in ISR.

Sept. 10 and Sept. 15: What are the problems and the questions?

Punch, "Research Questions" Chapter 3 ISR.

Ragin, "The Process of Social Research: Ideas and Evidence" Chapter 3 in CSR.

Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gleditsch, "Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New
Dataset of Battle Deaths"

[Gilbert Burnham](#), [Riyadh Lafta](#), [Shannon Doocy](#), [Les Roberts](#), Mortality after the 2003
invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey.

Sept. 20 and Sept. 22: Research Design

General Guide/Template for a Research Design or Proposal

Punch, "From Research Questions to Data," Chapter 4 in ISR.

Punch, "Quantitative Research Design," Chapter 5 in ISR.

Sept. 27 and Oct. 1: On the causes of violence

Case study #1: Milgram's experiments on Violence

Assignment #1: Research Design

Unit 2: The Effects of Violence on its Victims

Oct. 6 and Oct. 8: Studying the effects of Torture

Case Study #2: Ibrahim A. Kira, et. al., “The Effects of Torture: Two Community Studies”

Punch, “Collecting quantitative Data,” Chapter 6 in ISR.

Oct. 15 and Oct. 20: Analyzing Data

Punch, “The Analysis of Quantitative Data,” Chapter 7 in ISR.

Oct. 22 and Oct. 27: Correlations versus Causation in Conflict Research.

Case Study: “Morality in the Democratic Republic of Congo”

Oct. 29: Mid-term Exam

Review and distribute mid-term exam.

Unit 3: Who are the Conflict Protagonists?

Oct. 31: Case Study #4:

Tal Litvak-Hirsch, et. al., “Whose House is this? Dilemmas of Identity Construction in the Israeli-Palestinian Context”

Nov. 3 and Nov. 5: Ethnographic Research

Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural Symbol” in The Interpretation of Cultures, pp. 87-125.

Punch, “Qualitative Research: Overview, Design and Grounded Theory,” Chapter 8 in ISR, pp. 134-164.

Nov. 10 and Nov. 12: Evaluating Therapy for Victims of Sexual violence

Case Study #3: Inger Skjelsbaek, “Therapeutic Work with victim of sexual violence” Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 12 (2): 93-118.

Ragin, “Using Qualitative Methods to Study Commonalities,” Chapter 4 in CSR.

Nov. 17 and Nov. 19: Grounded Theory

Punch, “Collecting Qualitative Data,” Chapter 9 in ISR.

Case Study #5: Debra Kaminer, “Forgiveness Attitudes of Truth Commission Deponents: Relation to Commission Response During Testimony”

Punch, “The Analysis of Qualitative Data” Chapter 10 of ISR.

Nov. 24: In-class assistance on research project.

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Unit 4: From Violence to Peace

Dec. 1 and Dec. 3: Transforming relationships among Conflict Protagonists

Case Study #6: Angel Veale and Aki Stavrou, "Former Lord's Resistance Army Child Soldier Abductees: Explorations of identity in Reintegration and Reconciliation"

Winnifred R. Louis, "Intergroup Positioning and Power," in Fathali M. Moghaddam, Rom Harré, and Naomi Lee, eds., Global Conflict Resolution through Positioning Analysis.

Ciaran Benson, "The Unthinkable boundaries of self: the role of negative emotional boundaries for the formation, maintenance, and transformation of identities," in Rom Harré and Fathali Moghaddam, eds., The Self and Others.

Dec. 8: Class presentations of case studies

Dec. 10: Integration of conflict themes, methodology, and case studies.

Course Requirements:

The course grade will be determined by an evaluation of the following four assignments and class participation.

Assignment #1: Research design

For this assignment you will apply the requirements for experimental design to a particular case of conflict research. The requirements for such a design will be presented in class. This will call for a 3-4 page report. [10% of course grade.]

Assignment #2: Mid-term exam

The mid-term will be distributed in class on October 22 and returned in one week. The exam consists of 4-6 questions, each of which calls for an essay that should include relevant information, definition of central concepts related to the question, and reasoned arguments. Each answer will require about 1-2 double spaced pages. [20% of course grade.]

Assignment #3: Research Project

The purpose of this project is to produce information about a problem, topic, or issue involving the interaction of individuals or group members. This projects requires the following activities: (a) select a topic that you find interesting, important, and/or engaging, raise a research problem that you seek to resolve (including research questions to be answered), (b) develop a plan for your research, (c) carrying out the plan, and (d) write a report. It is critical that the research problem to be addressed should be very simple and quite "researchable," which means that you can acquire the data without difficulty. Also, the methodology you use for analyzing the data should conform to one of the methods examined in class. [30% of course grade]

Assignment #4: Final Exam

The final exam will have a similar format to the mid-term: 4-6 essay-type questions, answers (1-2 double-spaced pages for each answer) should include relevant information, definition of central concepts related to the question, and reasoned arguments on behalf of your answer. The exam questions will be distributed on the final day of class on Dec. 8 and due Thursday, December 15, at 11:45. [30% of course grade.]

Class participation

The class participation grade rests on regular attendance to class sessions, participation during class, and active listening. The usual courtesies regarding the classroom environment are expected. All electronic equipment, cell-phones, and communication devices will be turned off, except laptops that are used solely for in-class note-taking. [10% of course grade.]

HONOR POLICY

All students are expected to abide by the Honor Code:

Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work. Failure to comply with this code may result in academic penalty in accordance with the procedures of the Honor Committee.