

COURSE SYLLABUS

Faculty:	Professor James Coben
Course:	Theories of Conflict
Semester:	Spring 2014
Meeting Schedule:	Wednesdays (6:30-8:40pm)
Room:	100
Office Hours and Communication:	I am generally on campus Monday-Thursday 9am-5pm (as well as immediately before and after our class on Wednesday evenings); and Sunday 11:00am-5:00pm. I am glad to schedule appointments whenever needed (just give me a call or email – 651-523-2137; jcoben@hamline.edu).

Course Description:

This interdisciplinary course introduces you to important theoretical perspectives on our understanding of conflict and conflict response. After a general introduction to the concepts of power, worldview and perspectivism, and the connection between these concepts and specific conflict theories, we will survey various perspectives on conflict and test them out in application. Specifically, we will explore the biological/ physiological, psychodynamic, social psychological, communication and sociological/political perspectives on conflict by reading and discussing major theoretical works within each perspective. Emphasis will be on comparing and distinguishing key dimensions of these theories, such as the nature and sources of conflict, conflict escalation, conflict response, and the nature of the third party role. Using case studies, exercises, and group discussion to draw upon personal experiences, including those involving race and social identity, the course explores the usefulness of each perspective to understanding the experience of conflict.

Required Texts:

- SOCIAL CONFLICT: ESCALATION, STALEMATE, AND SETTLEMENT 3RD EDITION (McGraw Hill 2004) by Dean G. Pruitt and Sung Hee Kim (ISBN: 9780072855357)
- CONTEXT AND PRETEXT IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION: CULTURE, IDENTITY, POWER, AND PRACTICE (Paradigm 2012) by Keven Avruch (ISBN: 9781612050607)
- Supplemental Readings will be posted to the Course TWEN site

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Recognize how your own beliefs, values and life experiences inform the way you experience and relate to conflict;
- Understand how worldviews, ideologies and broad belief-systems shape our individual and collective understanding of conflict;
- Identify major theoretical approaches used to understand conflict;
- Be able to use these approaches to analyze specific conflict situations;
- Understand how these approaches to conflict analysis influence choices for appropriate conflict response; and
- Appreciate the strengths, usefulness and limitations of each approach used to analyze conflict.

“There are no data independent of theory, no observations not made from a perspective. Data alone do not tell us anything; they do not speak, but are interpreted by people.”

Carol Gilligan (1993). *Reply to critics*. In M.J. Larrabee, *AN ETHIC OF CARE: FEMINIST AND INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES*, 207-214. New York, NY: Routledge.

“The stories I heard...were not about ‘what happened’ (itself a questionable concept). What I heard was how people *saw* what happened, or, rather, how people *remembered* what they saw, or rather, how they *talked* about what they remembered, or rather, how they talked *to me* about what they remembered – or, rather, what I *heard* people say to me about what they remembered.”

Beth Roy (1994). *SOME TROUBLE WITH COWS: MAKING SENSE OF SOCIAL CONFLICT*, 5. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Course Expectations:

We will follow an interactive format, using regular group discussion and exercises to clarify and build upon our readings. We will be watching film clips, discussing case studies, and drawing on your own life experience to enrich our understanding of conflict, whether in interpersonal, inter-group, socio-cultural domestic or international contexts. As a result, active class participation is essential, as are class attendance and *preparation*.

Attendance Policy

Although this is a theory course, as described above, class sessions are designed to be highly interactive, with a significant amount of learning and insight coming from class discussion and activities. Moreover, since this class meets only once each week,

missing two classes is presumptively excessive and can be the basis for involuntary withdrawal from the course. If an emergency prevents your attendance, it is your responsibility to contact the professor as soon as is practicable. In addition, lateness and/or poor preparation will adversely affect your final course grade.

Computer Use:

I encourage you to use laptop computers or other electronic devices in class to take notes and access course-related materials. However, use of electronic devices for purposes unrelated to class (such as checking email, participating in chat rooms, surfing the web, etc.) is prohibited – such use may result in not being allowed to use electronic devices in class for the balance of the semester and/or a grade reduction.

TWEN Site:

Please confirm that you are registered with a correct email address on the course TWEN site (which will be open on Tuesday, January 21). Make sure the email address you use to register for TWEN remains valid during the semester or you will miss critical announcements and supplemental course material. Any powerpoint slides or other electronic media that I use in class will be posted to the TWEN site for download (available AFTER the class in which the material is utilized).

Assessment and Grading:

Online Discussions (combined 20%)

You will participate in two (2) online discussions, which together will total 20% of your grade. Discussions will be posted on TWEN during two different weeks over the course of the term. All students are expected to participate in the discussions and must make at least three (3) postings for each discussion: one (1) original substantial answer to the question(s) and a minimum of two (2) additional substantive responses to other students' original postings. Specific grading criteria are discussed at Attachment 1 to this syllabus.

- Discussion 1: Week of February 5 – February 12 (following class three). This discussion will focus on the idea of perspective in analyzing conflict. You will be expected to include in your postings reference to both readings and in-class activities. The specific question(s) will be posted on February 5. Your original post will be due by 11:55pm, February 8, with the additional required postings due no later than 5:00pm on February 12.
- Discussion 2: Week of March 26-April 2 (following class nine). This discussion will focus on the differences between the individualist and constructionist perspectives we will have covered to date. You will be expected to include in your postings reference to both readings and in-class activities. The specific question(s) will be posted on March 26. Your original post will be due by 11:55pm on March 29, with the additional required postings due no later than 5:00pm on April 2.

Written Reflection (20%)

Due at 5:00pm, Wednesday, April 16 (to be submitted by uploading on TWEN). This short written reflection will document insights you are gaining about the way different perspectives on conflict relate to your professional and personal life. The specific assignment will be distributed in class.

Final Paper (40%)

Due at 4:30pm, Friday, May 2 (to be submitted to the Law School Registrar's Office and graded anonymously). You will write an in-depth 10-12 page (excluding cover page and bibliography) analysis of the film *12 Angry Men*. Details of the assignment will be distributed in class.

Class Participation (20%)

This is not a lecture class where you can be a passive receptacle of information. It is designed to be interactive. You will learn best by becoming a fully engaged and participating member of the learning community. Failure to fully and actively participate may lower your grade. Exceptional participation may raise your grade.

Assignments

The following is the tentative schedule of assignments for class through the end of the semester. References to "Pruitt and Kim" or "Avruch" are to the two required course texts. Other readings will be posted to the course TWEN site.

January 22

Introduction to Conflict Theory

- Pruitt and Kim, Chapters 1-3
- Avruch, Chapter 1

January 29

Power, Contentious Tactics and Escalation

- Pruitt and Kim, Chapters 4 and 5
- Avruch, Chapter 9

February 5

Context and Pretext; Perspectivism

- Avruch, Chapters 2 and 3
- Smith, R. C. and Eisenberg, E. M. 1987. *Conflict at Disneyland: A Root-Metaphor Analysis*, COMMUNICATION MONOGRAPHS, 54: 367-380.
- Nealon, J. and Giroux, S.S. 2003. *Ideology*. In THE THEORY TOOLBOX: CRITICAL CONCEPTS FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (Rowman and Littlefield), pp. 83-94.

NOTE: First on-line discussion opens after class.

February 12

Biological and Psychodynamic Perspectives

- Quartz, S. R. and Sejnowski, T. J. 2002. *Our Brains, Ourselves*. In LIARS, LOVERS AND HEROS: WHAT THE NEW BRAIN SCIENCE REVEALS ABOUT HOW WE BECOME WHO WE ARE (Morrow), pp. 1-20.
- Brewer, M. 2001. *Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict: When Does Ingroup Love Become Outgroup Hate?* In SOCIAL IDENTITY, INTERGROUP CONFLICT, AND CONFLICT REDUCTION (Rutgers), pp. 17-41.

Note: First online discussion closes at 5:00pm

February 19

Learning Theory; Social Confrontation

- Kanfer, F. H. and Phillips, J. S. 1970. *The Behavioral Learning Model in Clinical Psychology*. In LEARNING FOUNDATIONS OF BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (John Wiley & Sons), pp. 51-91.
- Newell, W. and Stutman, R. 1989/90. *Negotiating Confrontation: The Problematic Nature of Initiation and Response*. In RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION 23: 139-162.

February 26

Communication Perspective

- Folger, J. P., Poole, M. S. and Stutman, R. 2012. *Communication and Conflict*. In WORKING THROUGH CONFLICT, 5th ed. (Addison Wesley Longman), pp. 16-39.

March 5

Introduction to Relational and Social Constructionist Perspective; Cultural Relativism

- Avruch, Chapters 4 and 6
- Gergen, K. 1999. *Toward Relational Selves*. In AN INVITATION TO SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION (Sage)

March 12

No class (SPRING BREAK)

March 19

Discourse Analytic Theory

- Conley, J. M. and O'Barr, W. M. 1998. *The Language of Mediation*. In JUST WORDS: LAW LANGUAGE AND POWER (University of Chicago Press).
- Conley, J. M. and O'Barr, W. M. 1998. *A Natural History of Disputing*, In JUST WORDS: LAW LANGUAGE AND POWER (University of Chicago Press).
- Folger, J. P. and Bush, R. A. B. 1994. *Ideology, Orientations to Conflict and Mediation Discourse*. In NEW DIRECTIONS IN MEDIATION (Sage).

March 26

No new readings. At some point before this class, visit a fast food restaurant and quietly observe the conflicts you see. Come to class prepared to discuss your findings.

NOTE: Second online discussion opens after class.

April 2

Structural Perspective: Social Structure; Social Dominance; Complex Systems

- Schellenberg, J. 1996. *Social Structural Theories*. In CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THEORY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE (SUNY Press), pp. 79-101
- Burton, J. 1993. *Conflict Resolution as a Political Philosophy*. In CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEORY AND PRACTICE: INTEGRATION AND APPLICATION (Manchester University Press), pp. 55-64.
- Costantino, C. A., and Merchant, C. S. 1995. *Recognizing Conflict Management as a System*. In DESIGNING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (Jossey Bass), pp. 19-32.

Note: Second online discussion closes at 5:00pm

April 9

A Return to Tactics (from a cognitive/social psychological theoretical frame)

- Pruitt and Kim, Chapters 6, 8 and 9

April 16

Application of All Theories to a Conflict Situation: View and discuss *12 Angry Men* (in preparation for final written assignment).

April 23

Third Party Role; Transitional Justice

- Pruitt and Kim, Chapters 10 and 11
- Avruch, Chapters 7 and 8

This syllabus is derived in significant part from the work on the place of perspective in conflict analysis led by my colleague Professor Ken Fox. Ken wishes to acknowledge the important influence and contributions of Professor Jack Schaffer, with whom Ken originally developed this course in 1997 and with whom he has taught the course in the Hamline University School of Business and School of Liberal Studies. Ken further acknowledges the role Professor Dorothy J. Della Noce played in the more recent development of this course. In turn, Dorothy would like to acknowledge her gratitude to Professors Joseph P. Folger and Randall K. Stutman, whose courses on Conflict Theory and Communication Theory at Temple University have had a profound influence on her work in the development of her teaching.

Attachment 1
Grading criteria for on-line discussions

As provided in the course syllabus, “you will participate in two (2) online discussions, which together will total 20% of your grade. Discussions will be posted on TWEN at different times over the course of the term. All students are expected to participate in the discussions and must make at least three (3) postings for each discussion: one (1) original substantial answer to the question(s) and a minimum of two (2) additional substantive responses to other students’ original postings.”

With respect to both online discussions, you will be asked to “approach these questions from the perspective of your work or professional experience and based upon your personal interactions.” Be both thoughtful and practical. I am looking for the degree to which you seriously and deeply think about these questions.

A “substantial” original posting will be several paragraphs in length and will respond to the discussion question(s) with some level of complexity and sophistication. Stronger postings will include specific reference both to readings and to in-class discussions and simulations, where appropriate. Strong participation will be evidenced by the thoughtfulness in your original posting and how seriously and respectfully you engage in responding to, and building upon, the original postings and responses of your classmates. With respect to additional postings, more than two (2) responses may influence your earned points with respect to “seriously and respectfully” engaging other postings. Based on these criteria, my grading is as follows:

Timely posting(s):	2
Directly addressed the question(s) presented:	3
“Seriously and deeply” thought about question(s):	6
Minimum of 1 original and 2 responsive postings:	3
“Seriously and respectfully” engaged other postings:	6

Total possible points for each discussion assignment: 20

19 – 20 points	A
17 – 18 points	A-
16 points	B+
15 points	B
14 points	B-
13 points	C+
12 points	C
11 points	C-
10 points	D+
09 points	D
08 points	D-
0 – 7 points	F