PSYC 430: The Psychology of Social Conflict  
Oberlin College, Spring 2014

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Office: Severance 211, 775-8499  
Office hours: Tuesday, 3 – 4 pm; Thursday, 2 – 3 pm

COURSE OVERVIEW
What can psychology contribute to an understanding of social conflict? Through an investigation of research and theory from the fields of social, cognitive, and political psychology, this course explores the psychological processes that lead to and exacerbate conflict, as well as those that contribute to resolving conflicts. The course is organized into three main sections:

I. GROUNDING OUR ANALYSIS: POWER BASES AND TACTICS
We will begin with a close exploration of power dynamics, because power ultimately determines how a conflict unfolds, how it is resolved, and indeed whether it even occurs.

II. FORCES LEADING TO CONFLICT.
Examining both individual and group processes, we will explore some well-known concepts in psychology and discuss how they help us understand why social conflict often becomes so embattled and intractable.

III. TECHNIQUES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION.
Drawing from the expertise of those involved with conflict resolution in many settings -- from corporate board rooms to international peace talks -- we will investigate what psychologists know about resolving conflicts peacefully.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
All students are expected to come to class having read and thought about the readings. You should contribute something to class discussion every single class. Other course requirements include:

Weekly written response: Each week, you will submit a written response to the week’s reading. These responses should NOT be summaries; I have done the reading, and don’t need a reminder. They do not need to be long (no more than a page) or exhaustive (you do not need to elaborate on every single reading). Use them as an opportunity to crystalize your thoughts on the reading before coming to class. Write about any reactions, questions, agreements, critiques, or related lines of thought that the readings inspire. Feel free to talk about how the readings relate to your conflict. They will be turned in electronically before 10:00 am Wednesday morning each week, and will be graded (\(^\sqrt{-}\), \(^\sqrt{\ }\), \(^\sqrt{+}\)) on content, not style. Responses must be received by 10 am to get full credit. Note: A \(^\sqrt{\ }\) is the default grade; \(^\sqrt{+}\)’s are given sparingly. A \(^\sqrt{-}\) is an indication that your responses are missing the mark. Feel free to come talk with me at any time to receive feedback on your responses. You may skip ONE response paper during the semester without penalty.
Conflict Presentation: At the beginning of the semester, all students will choose a real-life conflict that they will present to the class; this conflict will also serve as the subject matter of your term paper for the course. Students will take turns presenting their conflicts to the class throughout the first two sections of the course. These presentations will serve as a springboard for class discussion, and will provide the class with concrete examples to which abstract concepts can be tied. They will also allow each presenter to benefit from the class’s input when preparing their papers (see below).

You may choose any conflict that interests you (international, political, cultural, etc.), provided you have access to enough information about it to make a meaningful analysis of it. Your presentation should provide the class with a description of the parties involved in the conflict, as well as how the conflict developed. You should also offer thoughts on how the concepts from the day’s readings relate to this particular situation.

Term Paper: Throughout the semester, you will work towards creating a 15 – 20 page term paper presenting and analyzing your conflict using the concepts from the course readings. This paper will be written and submitted in sections (please see the course website for a more detailed description of each section):

Section 1: In 4 - 5 pages, describe the conflict you have chosen, including an analysis of the power dynamics present.
Section 2: In 5 - 7 pages, discuss how this conflict can be understood using the concepts we have discussed in the first part of class.
Section 3: In 5 - 7 pages, discuss how the conflict you have chosen might potentially be resolved using concepts we have discussed in the second part of class.

Each section is due at 4:00 pm on a Friday (see syllabus for dates) to limit the extent to which paper-writing interferes with class preparation. Please submit papers electronically via blackboard. I prefer papers to be submitted in MS Word so that I can edit and add comments directly into the paper.

Late work: Occasionally, we all have catastrophes and fall apart. Should this happen to you this semester (and I hope it doesn’t), you may have 48 extra hours to complete any ONE paper. You may only do this once during the semester, and this does not apply to weekly response papers. NO OTHER EXTENSIONS WILL BE GIVEN, unless you are kidnapped by aliens or dying in the hospital. Late papers will lose one grade (i.e., from A to A-) for each day late. Papers turned in on Monday, for example, cannot get a grade higher than a B+.

One goal of this course is to help students become better writers. Writing improves with practice, and with feedback. Thus, at the end of the semester, you have the opportunity to revise all sections of your term paper before you resubmit them as one cohesive whole. At this point I will give a new grade for the whole paper that reflects your improvements and integration.

Your final grade will be determined using the following formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation &amp; weekly responses</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term Paper Section 1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term Paper Section 2</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Paper Section 3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Revision/integration</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</tbody>
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SYLLABUS (* = available on ERES; + = available at bookstore; all other articles available in electronic format through the library’s online catalog)

I. LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

2/5 INTRODUCTION

DATE TBA POWER


II. FORCES LEADING TO CONFLICT

2/19 EXTREMISTS AND ENEMY IMAGES

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS


2/26  ATTRIBUTIONAL BIASES & PERCEIVING THE OTHER
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS


2/28  FIRST PAPER SECTION DUE AT 5 PM

3/5  SHORTCOMINGS IN JUDGMENTS AND DECISION-MAKING
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS


3/12     SOCIAL MOTIVES, SOCIAL GROUPS
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS


II. TECHNIQUES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

3/19     PERCEIVING AND DEFINING JUSTICE
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS


4/2  FACILITATING DE-ESCALATION  
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS


4/9  EMOTION MANAGEMENT  
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS


4/16 NEgotiation and problem-solving
Student presentations


4/23 Third party intervention and mediation.

Class activity


4/30 Building peace for the long term


5/5 THIRD SECTION DUE at 5:00 PM

5/7 CONCLUSIONS (Dinner chez Frantz)

5/17 COMPLETE, REVISED TERM PAPER DUE BY 9:00 PM