

MANAGING INDIVIDUAL, GROUP, AND SYSTEMIC CONFLICT

PPA 730 Class # 24866

Fall 2008

Tuesdays, 9:30 AM to 12:15 PM

Maxwell Hall, Room 108

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Required Materials

- ✓ Costantino, Cathy A. and Merchant, Christina Sickles (1996). *Designing Conflict Management Systems: A Guide to Creating Productive and Healthy Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, Inc.
- ✓ Roger Schwarz (2002). *The Skilled Facilitator*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, Inc., 2nd Edition.
- ✓ O'Leary, Rosemary and Bingham, Lisa Blomgren (2007). *A Manager's Guide to Resolving Conflicts in Collaborative Networks*. IBM Center for the Business of Government, Networks, Collaboration and Partnership Series. (Distributed in class)
- ✓ All other materials will be available on blackboard.

Course Description and Objectives

This course will introduce the "suite of skills" embedded in the collaborative manager's capacity to pre-empt, prevent and manage conflict at the individual, group, and system levels in a manner consistent with least cost, highest involvement, and greatest satisfaction with results. Deep understanding of the spectrum of options for addressing conflict will be achieved, focusing on acquiring the voluntary dispute resolution skills of interest-based negotiation and problem solving; mediation of disputes; facilitation of group development and performance; high engagement meeting design and implementation; and dispute systems design to introduce more opportunities for the systematic use of these voluntary dispute resolution processes

within organizations and systems. The course will offer the theoretical foundation for the “evolution of voluntary resolution” and will focus on handing off the skills to class participants through highly interactive class sessions.

This course is primarily skills-oriented, and as such, students will be expected to apply the analytical framework and the techniques learned to “live” conflict situations, at times using the class itself as a laboratory for such learning. It is recognized as well that the degree to which there is ease with conflict and the ability to master conflict management techniques may depend on an individual’s style, personal history, and culture. The expectation is that all course participants will engage fully with the course concepts and techniques and seek to move from their current level of awareness, control and mastery of conflict management to a new and higher performance level. Successful accomplishment of this course will be a necessary requirement for consideration as a PARC “intern” when facilitation opportunities arise within the local client community.

Lastly, this course seeks to increase conflict competence by embedding voluntary conflict resolution awareness and skills in current and future public managers so that they may address – either directly as an intervener or indirectly as an informed consumer - the multitude of conflicts that will face them post-Maxwell in a manner that leads to creative, cost effective, lasting, and satisfying outcomes for disputants.

Grading and Course Assignments

All students are responsible for keeping up with class requirements, including turning in assignments on time. Assignments will be marked down one letter grade for each day late (i.e., one day late and your assignment goes from A- to a B+).

The readings and assignments are designed to help students: 1) build a foundation of knowledge and understanding of conflict management theory and practice, 2) develop the ability to analyze conflict situations, 3) acquire interest-based conflict management skills, from problem solving to facilitation to mediation, 4) develop the awareness that accompanies a third-party perspective, and 4) acquire the skill of designing appropriate interventions and alternatives to ongoing conflict situations.

33% of Grade → Weekly Preparation and Participation: Critical assessment of the readings and full participation in class discussions and application sessions are major portions of class activity. Careful preparation is essential. You are expected to arrive on-time and participate fully in all class sessions. Attendance at all classes is mandatory.

Learning and Application Groups: You are required to become a member of a small (3-5 person) learning group within the class as a whole. The small groups will have time allocated to them during most classes and this time will be an opportunity to: 1) discuss readings and lectures to clarify understanding and share insights; 2) explore situations

that group members believe will be opportunities to either observe or practice voluntary conflict resolution techniques; and 3) establish a support group for giving and receiving feedback on skill acquisition. It is expected that these groups may from time to time experience conflict themselves. At such times, it is always a choice for the group to ask for assistance from the professor to intervene to assist group functioning and to illustrate in a “here and now” fashion what can be done to resolve differences voluntarily.

Discussion in these learning groups should always cover the following topics:

- 1) **Your learning goals:** What skills and competencies do you want to acquire and for what purpose? Why are these important to you? How will you know that you have attained competency?
- 2) **Class reactions:** Thoughts and feelings about material and exercises presented in class. What specifically enhanced your learning? What was a barrier to learning? What might you or the Instructor do differently to maximize learning? What more do you need to know?
- 3) **Reading Reactions:** Notes, thoughts, feelings about reading assignments. What excites you, frustrates you, confuses you, or confirms or goes against some class learnings or your personal experience?

33% of Grade → Practicum: As this is a skills acquisition course, there will be opportunities, both in class and external to class, to practice the skills of interest based problem solving, facilitation/mediation, and dispute systems design. The in-class opportunities will come in the form of role plays and simulations. I will notify you of potential opportunities outside of class. I will evaluate your acquisition and development of these skills over the full period of the course.

33% of Grade → Project Analysis and Paper: You will be responsible for writing a 10-15 page paper that examines conflict in the “real world.” You will select, observe and assess a conflict situation that is of interest to you. Possible examples include but are not limited to: a public meeting or hearing; group dialogue or engagement process; a mediation session; a non-profit board meeting; a personal experience with a group or system or some issue that is in the news. More details and information will be provided in the next several weeks.

Course Policies

- ✓ **Civility and Respect:** Please treat everyone in this class with respect, sensitivity, and openness to new and different ideas. We are all different. Be tolerant and use these differences as learning opportunities. Distractive practices, such as tardy entrances, leaving

the room while class is in session, ringing cell phones, cell phone conversations, excessive conversation with other students, and conducting activities unrelated to class discussions are not acceptable and will be detrimental to your participation grade.

- ✓ **Academic Integrity:** The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

I take this extremely seriously. Plagiarism, cheating, assisting others to cheat, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will result in a grade of "F" for the course. The submission of any work by a student is taken as a guarantee that the thoughts and expressions in it are the student's own except when properly credited to another. It is your responsibility to understand what plagiarism is and how to correctly reference and cite documents and other peoples' arguments. Information about what constitutes plagiarism and how to make references and citations in papers can be found at <http://www.plagiarism.org/>. In addition, you may find assistance in any of the standard references on writing, such as *The Elements of Style*, as well as at the S.U. Writing Center (<http://wrt.syr.edu/>).

- ✓ **Academic Accommodations:** Students who may need academic accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester. In order to obtain authorized accommodations, students should be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498 and have an updated accommodation letter for the instructor. Accommodations and related support services such as exam administration are not provided retroactively and must be requested in advance." For more information about services and policy, visit the Office of Disability Services (<http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>).
- ✓ **Consultation and Assistance:** I am available to help you achieve the learning objectives for this course. When you need assistance or wish to discuss some element of the course or materials, or if other issues are interfering with your success in this course, please contact me immediately. Please do not wait until the last moment.