

## **SYLLABUS, COMM 395 COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT-WRITING**

### **PROFESSOR:**

Alan Sillars

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Office hours: Mon. 9-10, Wed. 12:15-1:00, Fri. 12:15-2:00 or by appointment  
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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Conflict is a common feature of personal, professional and public life that has a variety of potential consequences. Although conflict can be a disruptive force, it can also lead to innovation, improved adjustment, and better decisions. By studying conflict, we hope to gain competency at managing conflicts and to move them in a productive direction.

This course examines the intricacies of human conflict with special attention to communication processes that escalate, manage, and mediate disputes. We will cover such topics as the basic elements and nature of conflict, conflict styles, strategies, and patterns, subjective and discursive framing of conflict, power and resistance, interest-based negotiation, and conflict mediation. The concepts and theories discussed in the course are broadly applicable to different types of conflict. We will analyze examples of interpersonal, political, environmental, organizational, and family conflicts. Both theory and application are stressed, with an emphasis on their inter-relationship.

The content of COMM 395 (Communication and Conflict-Writing) is equivalent to COMM 412 (Communication and Conflict); however, COMM 395 is a writing intensive class designed to fulfill the Upper Division Writing Requirement of UM's general education requirements. Credit is not allowed for both COMM 395 and COMM 412. If you have already taken COMM 412 or are now taking that class, you are not eligible to enroll in COMM 395.

We will work to enhance writing proficiency through in-class workshops focused on principles of effective writing and identification of common writing errors. Peer critiques and a writing self-assessment will help students identify writing strengths and areas for improvement. You will submit five papers for the course, including four short reaction papers that respond to assigned readings and a major research paper consisting of a conflict case study. You will submit portions of the case study in stages over the course of the semester and revise the paper based on instructor and peer feedback. Papers will be graded based on writing as well as content.

### **WRITING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the semester, students should achieve the following learning outcomes for upper-division writing courses:

- Identify and pursue more sophisticated questions for academic inquiry

- Find, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information effectively from diverse sources
- Manage multiple perspectives as appropriate
- Recognize the purposes and needs of discipline-specific audiences and adopt the academic voice necessary for the chosen discipline
- Use multiple drafts, revision, and editing in conducting inquiry and preparing written work
- Follow the conventions of citation, documentation, and formal presentation appropriate to that discipline
- Develop competence in information technology and digital literacy

#### **TEXTS**

- Wilmot, W.W. & Hocker, J.L. (2011). *Interpersonal conflict* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fisher, E., Ury, W., & Patton, B. (1991). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Lunsford, A. A. (2005). *The Everyday Writer*, (3rd Edition). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS**

Electronic Reserve (Mansfield Library)

- Sillars, A. Roberts, L., Dun, T., & Leonard, K. (2001). Stepping into the stream of thought: Cognition during marital conflict. In V. Manusov & J. H. Harvey (Eds.), *Attribution, communication behavior, and close relationships* (pp. 193-210). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rogan, R.G. (forthcoming). A terrorist's messages to the world: A frame analysis of Osama bin Laden's fatwas. In Donohue, W.A., Kauffman, S., & Rogan, R.G. (Eds), *Framing in Negotiation: State of the art*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Lutgen-Sandvik, P. (2006). Take this job and...: Quitting and other forms of resistance to workplace bullying. *Communication Monographs*, 73, 406-433.

Web Readings

- Rosenberg, S. Face. *Beyond intractability*. G. Burgess & H. Burgess (Eds.), Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted February, 2004 to <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/face>.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

### Exams

There will be two exams over the lectures and readings. The exams will be a combination of objective and short essay questions. The second exam will be noncumulative.

### Conflict case study

You will write a paper analyzing a conflict that is in the public domain, for example, a conflict that is portrayed in the news, on the internet, in historical documents, or in literature. The conflict can be real or fictional and either historical or contemporary, provided that you can locate sufficient material to conduct an in-depth analysis. To conduct the analysis, you will need written texts (for example, letters, blog posts, speeches, news reports) that give background on the conflict and also provide first person accounts of the conflict from the perspective of the principal parties. One of the goals of the paper is to analyze how people subjectively and discursively frame conflict, so you need statements from parties who are directly involved in the conflict describing the situation in their own words. Third party analysis (such as news reports, historical analysis, or editorials by third parties) may be useful as background but you will also need first person accounts to conduct the analysis.

The paper may take the form of either: 1) a *frame analysis* in which you identify subjective and discursive frames in a conflict and analyze their implications (see the Rogan reading as a model), or 2) a *conflict assessment* focusing on particular aspects of conflict (e.g., power, goals, culture) that seem important to the case that you are analyzing (see Wilmot and Hocker's Conflict Assessment Guide for ideas). Some examples of suitable material for either analysis include: 1) documents or web pages produced by organizations involved in a local environmental conflict; 2) speeches, interviews, and other public statements by political figures involved in international disputes; 3) a novel that provides a complex account of family conflict, 4) counter-institutional web sites that vent employee and customer dissatisfactions (e.g., targetsucks.com, radioshacksucks.biz, walmartsucks.org); 5) public testimony at meetings (such as City Council meetings) that involve conflicts over land use or neighborhood planning; 6) blogs and other web posts that air conflicts involving celebrities, sports figures and/or their fans; or 7) news stories that reveal differences in media framing of conflict (e.g., stories about Middle East conflicts by U.S. vs. Middle Eastern news sources).

There are other possibilities and I will consider creative ideas but keep in mind that this is not a self-analysis paper, so the conflict should not be one that you have personally experienced or that involves your own circle of acquaintances. In addition, you must work from written texts. Movies and fictional television shows do not provide sufficient material, unless supplanted with transcripts and other documents. In most cases, you cannot conduct your own interviews with disputing parties without first obtaining approval from UM's Institutional Review Board.

Other ideas and guidelines for the research paper will be covered in class.

### Attendance, participation, and class preparation

Class attendance and participation are essential because much of the course content will be presented through class discussions and activities, including writing workshops. More than three absences will result in a grade reduction, with the number of points deducted based on the number of absences over three. In addition, you have to be in class on days when reaction papers are due to get credit, since the reaction papers are designed to stimulate class discussion of the readings. Of course, I will show flexibility toward someone who misses days for reasons that are truly unavoidable, such as an extended illness or family emergency. Please email me if such a situation arises.

Before reaction papers are due, I will distribute a set of questions about the reading that you might consider and write about. Please come to class prepared to discuss the questions and the content of your reaction paper. There will also be a few mini-assignments (peer critiques and a writing self assessment) that require some out-of-class preparation.

### Grading

Grades will be assigned using the +/- system on the following basis:

Exam 1	100 points
Exam 2	100 points
Conflict case study - draft	125 points
Conflict case study - revised	75 points
Reaction papers (4)	60 points
Peer critiques and writing self-assessment	40 points
	500 total possible

### **DATES AND DEADLINES**

Wed. February 9	Submit a brief description of your plans for the conflict case study, including the texts that you plan to analyze.
Wed. March 16	Exam 1
Wed. April 20	Conflict case study due
Wed. May 4	Revised conflict case paper due
Tues. May 11 (Tues.3:20)	Exam 2

## **READING SCHEDULE**

Exam 1:                   Wilmot & Hocker, chapters 1-3,5,7,10  
                              Sillars  
                              Rogan

Exam 2:                   Wilmot & Hocker, chapters 4,8,9  
                              Fisher, Ury, & Patton, chapters 1-5  
                              Lutgen-Sandvik  
                              Rosenberg

I will notify you in advance and give you questions to consider before the days when we will discuss specific readings and when reaction papers are due.

### **Academic Misconduct:**

Academic misconduct includes cheating on exams, plagiarism, interfering with the work of another student, and fabrication of research. Plagiarism entails using the words or ideas of another source without giving appropriate credit to the source. See Lunsford's *The Everyday Writer* for guidelines about plagiarism and ways to avoid it. Depending on the severity of the violation, plagiarism or other misconduct will result in an "F" on the assignment, failure of the course, and/or recommendation of a University sanction.