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COMM 3110: MANAGING RELATIONAL CONFLICT

Spring 2017

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Office Hours: Mondays/Wednesdays 1:45-2:45 PM; Tuesdays 11-12:00 noon, or by appointment

Course Description

This course focuses on how people use communication to manage interpersonal conflicts. Conflict communication powerfully affects and reflects relationships. Following an overview about the nature of conflict, we will explore the manner in which conflict emerges and results in various outcomes. Then we will examine conflict as it occurs in different social and personal contexts.

Course Goal

My aim for you is that you learn how to manage conflict in order to achieve your goals and meet other people's expectations. The following objectives will help achieve this goal.

Course Objectives

1. Learn about the nature of conflict—what it is, how it occurs, and what its consequences are.
2. Discover alternative strategies to manage conflict.
3. Understand how conflict occurs in different relationships and contexts; and
4. Discuss conflict with class colleagues from an educated point of view.

Course Requirements

A total of 1,000 points is possible (100% possible).

1. *Examinations.* Two examinations—a Mid-term and a Final—will be used to assess course understanding to date. These will be true/false and multiple choice. *Each test is worth 20% of your final grade (40% of final grade).* A study guide will be presented a week before each test.
2. *Research Project.* Each of you will write a brief (10 page) research paper that examines some aspect of conflict **(25% of final grade)**. NOTE: You must request, on a form in writing, my permission to pursue a particular research topic. You may not

proceed with your research until your topic is approved. Here are some topics that students have pursued in the past.

- parent-adolescent;
- friendship;
- family systems;
- romantic couple/marital conflict;
- small group conflict;
- organizational conflict;
- intercultural conflict; and so forth.

Naturally, some topics regarding conflict vary within a context. For example, in romantic relationships, topics could involve commitment, divorce, abuse, jealousy, long-distance relationships, and so forth. In organizational contexts, topics could regard superior-subordinate, negotiation, mediation, inter-departmental, inter-organizational conflict and the like. In all cases, you need to make sure that the topics you research emphasize *communication behavior*.

You will review the most relevant and recent research articles, synthesize those findings, and present your finding. Plan on referencing one academic research article per page you submit. Course material can count but only as one reference. You should use at least 10 sources.

In a separate post, the standards for the research paper shall be offered.

3. *Personal Conflict Report (2)*. These 2-4 page reports concern conflicts that you have personally experienced or observed between two people who know each other (i.e., roommate, parent-child, co-worker, sibling, friend, and romantic partners). You will write about the background to the conflict, the issues at stake, how the conflict was managed, and any outcomes of the conflict. Each worth 100 points (10%) for a total of 200 points (combined, **20% of final grade**).
4. *Participation*. Participation in this class is vital to your learning about communication in conflict (150 points or **15% of final grade**). Specifically, throughout the term, you will be assessed according to the following criteria:
 - a. Attendance. For those who want a guideline, then count on losing one-third of a participation grade for every absence.
 - b. Preparedness to discuss the readings. Be sure to read the assignments and be prepared to offer and receive questions about the reading content.
 - c. I think that texting in class shows a lack of participation. Also, it is distracting my attention and probably others in the class. Use of small electronic devices in class will result a 1/3 of a participation grade each it occurs.
 - d. In-class exercises. Many will be fun, but all will require thinking.
 - e. Out of class exercises. These require you to respond to class discussion but spend time outside of class to do so.
 - f. keeping in touch if you have any questions (please see office hours above).

University Policies

The Americans with Disabilities Act. The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services (CDS), 162 Olpin Union Building, (801) 581-5020, <http://disability.utah.edu/> CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.

Academic Integrity. Academic honesty is required of all students. Dishonesty in academics of any kind is a serious offense, which undermines both the reputation and quality of degrees issued by the University of Utah. Plagiarism of any kind, intentional and/or unintentional, will result in strict sanctions against the student per university policy. Please meet with me immediately if you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism.

-*The University Code: Section V. A.* Students must adhere to generally accepted standards of academic honesty, including but not limited to, refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, research misconduct, misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating.

-*Section V. B.* A student who engages in academic misconduct ... may be subject to academic sanctions including but not limited to a grade reduction, failing grade, probation, suspension, or dismissal from the program or the University, or revocation of the student's degree or certificate.

Accommodation Policy. I can schedule accommodations for those who have religious/spiritual observances, University-sanctioned activities, family, and medical-related emergencies. If you anticipate any scheduling conflict with this course, please speak with me and provide documentation as soon as possible. In every case, it is your responsibility to make these arrangements.

COURSE READINGS

Canary, D. J., & Lakey, S. (2013). *Strategic conflict*. New York: Routledge. (Routledge Communication Series, Jennings Bryant & Dolf Zillmann, Series Editors.

Cupach, W. R., Canary, D. J., and Spitzberg (2009). *Competence in interpersonal conflict*, 2nd edition. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

NOTE: We will cover the chapter readings on the days presented below. You need to read the chapters in order to understand the lectures and participate in class discussions. Lecture material will cover and extend the course readings. So not all material covered will be in the textbook.