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COMX 413.01: Communication and Conflict-Writing

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SYLLABUS, COMM 413 COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT-WRITING

PROFESSOR:

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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 413 (Communication and Conflict-Writing) is equivalent to COMM 412 (Communication and Conflict); however, COMM 413 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 413 AND COMM 412.**

We will work to enhance writing proficiency through in-class workshops. You will submit three short reaction papers that respond to assigned readings, along with a major research paper consisting of a conflict case study. You will submit portions of the case study in stages over 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

READINGS

Fisher, E., Ury, W., & Patton, B. (1991). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in* (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

(Other editions would be fine but you don't need the newest edition. Purchase through Amazon etc.)

Articles and Chapters posted on Moodle

- Folger, J. P., Poole, M. S., & Stutman, R. K. (2013). *Working through conflict* (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
Introduction
Chapter 1: Communication and conflict
Chapter 8: Managing conflict
- Wilmot, W.W. & Hocker, J.L. (2011). *Interpersonal conflict* (8th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
Chapter 3: Interests and goals
Chapter 4: Power: The structure of conflict
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Domenici, K. (2007). *Communication, conflict, and the management of difference*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
Chapter 3: Taking a systems view (read first half of chapter only, pp. 55-62)
- Cupach, W. R. & Canary, D. J. (2010). *Competence in interpersonal conflict*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
Chapter 3: Conflict Messages
- 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. (2011). A terrorist's messages to the world: A frame analysis of Osama bin Laden's declarations of war against the United States. In W.A. Donohue, R.G., Rogan, & S. Kauffman (Eds), *Framing matters: Perspectives on negotiation research and practice in communication* (pp. 210-233). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

- Ury, W., & Smoke, R. (1991). Anatomy of a crisis. In J. W. Breslin and J. Z. Rubin (Eds.), *Negotiation theory and practice* (pp. 47-54). Cambridge: The Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School.
- Lutgen-Sandvik, P. (2006). Take this job and...: Quitting and other forms of resistance to workplace bullying. *Communication Monographs*, 73, 406-433.
- Hale, C. L. & Thieme, A. (2010). Mediating conflict. In Cupach, W. R. & Canary, D. J., *Competence in interpersonal conflict* (pp. 253-282). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

READING SCHEDULE

- Exam 1: Introduction (from Folger et al.)
 Communication and conflict (Folger, et al., chapter 1)
 Interests and goals (Wilmot & Hocker, chapter 3)
 Taking a systems view (Littlejohn & Domenici)
 Conflict messages (Cupach & Canary, chapter 3)
 "Death to America": A frame analysis of Osama... (Rogan)
 Stepping into the stream of thought (Sillars et al.)
- Exam 2: Managing conflict (Folger et al., chapter 8)
 Getting to yes, chapters 1-5 (Fisher et al.)
 Anatomy of a crisis (Ury & Smoke)
 Power: The structure of conflict (Wilmot & Hocker, chapter 4)
 Take this job and... (Lutgen-Sandvik)
 Mediating conflict (Hale & Thieme)

RECOMMENDED WRITING TEXT

- Lunsford, A. A. (2005). *The Everyday Writer*, (3rd ed.). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. (Any edition would be fine.)

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.

Reaction Papers

There are three short (2 page) reaction papers in which you respond to questions about one of the readings. These are due on days when we will discuss the reading in class.

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 paper should be 8-12 pages, not counting the appendix or references, with standard font, margins, spacing. 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 perspectives 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. 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, radiosacksucks.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. Therefore, plan to rely on information that is already published or otherwise in the public domain.

Some papers from past classes are posted on the course Moodle site to serve as examples. Other ideas and guidelines for the research paper will be covered in class.

Attendance, participation, and workshop 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. Please come prepared to discuss the readings and your paper on those days. 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.

Writing workshops. You will submit your conflict case study in stages to get instructor and peer feedback. Two class periods will be devoted to writing workshops, in which you provide and receive comments on drafts of the case study. Students will work in groups of four. To prepare for workshops, students will submit their drafts a week in advance by posting on the course Moodle site. Prior to the workshop day, members of each workshop group should read one another's drafts and bring written feedback to class.

Grading

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

Exam 1	100 points
Exam 2	100 points
Conflict case study - draft	100 points
Conflict case study - revised	100 points
Reaction papers (3)	60 points
Workshop preparation	
Workshop 1	20 points
Workshop 2	20 points
	500 total possible

IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES

Tues., Sept. 10	Submit a brief description of your plans for the conflict case study, including the texts that you plan to analyze.
Thurs. Sept. 12	COMM department faculty retreat (no class)
Thurs. Sept. 19	Reaction paper #1 due
Thurs. Oct. 3	Reaction paper #2 due
Thurs. Oct. 10	Exam 1
Tues. Oct. 22	Draft intro./background for conflict case study due (submit to Moodle site)
Tues., Oct. 29	Writing workshop
Tues., Nov. 5	Reaction paper #3 due
Thurs., Nov. 21	NCA convention (no clas)
Tues., Nov. 26	Complete draft of conflict case study due (submit to Moodle site).
Tues., Dec. 3	Writing Workshop

Thurs., Dec. 5 Exam 2

Tues., Dec. 10 Optional class for those wanting additional help with
(10:10) revisions

Thurs. Dec. 12 Revised conflict case study due (submit to Moodle site)

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. 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.