

Culture and Conflict: Cross Cultural Perspectives

Nova Southeastern University
Department of Dispute Resolution
ADRM 6120
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Instructors: Dr. Cathie Witty and Dr. Sean Byrne
Course #: ADRM 6120
Time, Place: Wednesday & Thursday, 6-9 P.M.
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Required Texts:

Nervous Conditions, A Novel, Tsitsi Dangarembga, The Seal Press, 1988.

When I was Puerto Rican. Esmeralda Santiago, Vintage Books, 1994.

Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics, bell hooks, South End Press, 1990.

Negotiating Across Cultures, Communication Obstacles in International Diplomacy, Raymond Cohen, USIP, Washington, 1995.

Who is Black? One Nations's Definition, F. James Davis, Pennsylvania State University, 1993.

This graduate seminar has been envisioned as a collective exercise in critical thinking. The course will explore the cultural dimensions of conflict, including the role of culture in defining and understanding conflict for individuals and groups. We will look at the cultural dimensions of conflict in three ways: the dynamics of interpersonal beliefs and socialization, academic theory, and international conflict. As small groups, we will explore our personal biases and learn how to recognize and elicit the biases of others. We will read what others have discovered about the nature of conflict through research and living in various cultural settings. Finally, the combined class will create a role play involving assessment, process design and intervention in a simulated cultural conflict.

Course objectives are focused on understanding:

- students' values, perceptions, experiences and assumptions related to their own cultural background; self assessment of "blind spots" and cultural assumptions that play a role in conflict perception and assessment
- variables related to the definition and processing of conflicts across cultures; the effects of child rearing practices, language, family structure, racism, sexism, kinship and other cultural variables on levels of conflict in a society
- the role of culturally sensitive assessment as a requirement for conflict intervention
- ways of gaining insight into the perspectives of others in conflict situations

My goal is to engender an informal participatory class environment where we can collectively assess the relative explanatory power of various theoretical approaches and subject them to rigorous examination. In order to provide an educational setting congruent with the material under review, the seminar will be structured generally after the manner of a colloquium, where students and instructor will gather to discuss the material in-depth and in a critical and systematic manner. The exact nature of this structure, however, will be dynamic and evolving, because it will be defined by the group as a whole. Students will also be required to write a mid-term exam and a research paper. The research paper encourages each student to select an area in cross-cultural conflict that s/he is interested in, and apply the theory and knowledge learned during the course of the semester to that topic.

The mid-term exam is an essay oriented exam to test the theoretical and broad-base knowledge of each student. Each student should have an in-depth knowledge of cross-cultural conflicts by the end of the semester.

In this class we will also utilize various technologies such as email, electronic library searches, netscape data collection and data base research and retrieval. In addition, this class is designed to incorporate a number of teaching methods to enhance the learning experience. They partially include: formal lectures, readings class exercises, open class discussions, simulations, student presentations, slides, homework exercises, field research and videos. Gui Batista and Deidre Gallop will assist me with the class as part of their PhD Teaching Practicum class. Deidre and Gui will make class presentations from time-to-time.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation

The class will be run to a large extent as a seminar. The Professor will briefly lecture at the beginning of the class and set the tone for the discussions. The expectation is that all students will attend regularly. Regular attendance is important for two reasons: first, the classes will help you to identify and absorb nuances inherent in the readings. Secondly, the quality of class discussion is contingent upon your ability to build on previous deliberations and analyses. You cannot build a store of knowledge without a measure of consistency and continuity. Students are expected to participate actively in class discussion and activities.

Because of the importance of classroom activities, students will be expected to miss no more than two class sessions in order to receive a passing grade in the course. The burden of demonstrating that absence from class was due to extenuating circumstances rests with the student. To this end, please note that attendance is mandatory, and that I shall hold each student personally responsible for consulting with me regarding materials missed in the event of any absence. Anyone exceeding two unexcused absences should not expect to receive an "A" grade in this course. Under School policy three unexcused absences result in an automatic failure.

Success in this class requires that you do all the reading and that you come regularly to class. Students will be expected to have completed the reading assignments for each week prior to seminar sessions. The readings will serve as vehicles for lectures and discussions in the classroom. Class participation should provide some evidence that you are keeping up with the readings and continuing to think about the issues in the course. This is a pro-active, hands-on learning approach to improve one's communication skills. Evaluation of your class participation will be based on the following criteria:

- 1). Raising and answering questions related to the assigned readings;
- 2). Sharing ideas, insights and feelings;
- 3). Sharing personal experiences and observations;
- 4). Pointing out relevant data;
- 5). Relating and synthesizing the ideas of others;
- 6). Providing constructive feedback on the learning climate and processes in the classroom;
- 7). Pointing out relationships to earlier discussion;
- 8). Helping others develop their views and ideas.

10% of your grade will be based on attendance and active class participation.

Class Presentations

Students will be required to do one class presentation, based on the readings for those weeks. The students will be responsible for taking the lead in our discussion of the reading material. The class presentations each week will act as a catalyst for our broader class discussion. The students leading the discussion must summarize the key points in the reading material and develop questions that will stimulate class discussion of the assigned material. Useful questions will synthesize the major themes or ideas portrayed in the readings. For example,

- 1). What can we learn about how Gender, Identity and Colonialism inter-relate in *Nervous Conditions*?
- 2). According to *When I Was Puerto Rican*, how can Language and Non-Verbal Behavior lead to miscommunication between cultures?
- 3) What can we learn about Power, Racism and Cross Cultural Conflict from Bell hooks, *Yearning*?

Students must prepare 3-5 page outlines (key points and class discussion questions) and bring enough copies for all students. The outlines should use complete sentences and be understandable without reference back to the readings. It is the task of the presenters to develop key questions around the issues.

10% of your grade will be based on your presentation of selected readings for class discussion. Your preparation for the class, the assigned reading outline and your leading of the group discussion will comprise the grade. All students should have read the required material and be prepared to discuss them, regardless of whether they are presenting in a given class.

Mid-Term Examination

An in-class written exam will be administered mid-way through the semester. Students will be required to choose among a list of questions that cover ideas addressed in the first half of the class. 30% of your grade will be based on the mid-term exam.

Simulation

A class simulation on cross-cultural conflict in Northern Ireland will be run at the end of the semester. Students will receive their role plays and instructions well in advance of the actual class simulation. 15% of your grade will be based on how well you prepare for and act out your role play in the simulation, demonstrating a knowledge of the conflict and the positions and interests of the other parties to the conflict.

How To Read Articles & Books

Many students may have never received any formal training and/or practice in how to obtain the most from reading assignments in the least amount of time. The most effective approach to this task, in my experience, has been to follow and to practice very particular guidelines in reading the assignments for this course:

- 1). What is the author's thesis? The major point s/he is trying to make?
- 2). What are the major assumptions the author names (and expects you to accept) in arguing that thesis?
- 3). What are the implications for research or practice if the author's thesis and underlying assumptions are valid or true?
- 4). What are some important or useful concepts the author presents?
- 5). How does the reading relate to previous readings?
- 6). Critically reflect on and assess the article as a whole; what are its strengths and weaknesses?
- 7). Are there any other arguments or perspectives that might explain the topic better than the author's argument?

Scholarly Research Paper

A 15-20 page research paper on a topic of your choice is due at the end of the semester. You should begin to think about the topic of your paper at the beginning of the semester. You must submit an outline of the paper and a bibliography by March 1.

The expectation of the instructor is that you will employ a full library search strategy to uncover materials for your paper and that you will query (when applicable and appropriate) various persons and agencies regarding their practice and experience in the topic area. The paper will be due April 9. 35% of your grade will be based on the research paper. As an added incentive, the two best scholarly papers in the class will be nominated for the annual departmental prize.

GRADING CRITERIA

- Class Attendance & Participation (10%)
- Class Presentation (10%)
- Simulation Preparation & Participation (15%)
- Mid-Term Exam (30%)
- Final Research Paper (35%)

Late assignments will be marked down if the student fails to notify the instructor in advance of the circumstances surrounding the reason for turning the paper in late.

READ: Brendan O"Duffy. 1993. Containment or Regulation? The British Approach to Ethnic Conflict in Northern Ireland. In John McGarry and Brendan O"Leary (eds). The Future of Northern Ireland. Oxford: Oxford University Press.(Pp. 128-50).

Sean Byrne. 1995. Conflict Regulation or Conflict Resolution: Third-Party Intervention in the Northern Ireland Conflict Prospects for Peace. Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence, 7(2):1-24. Documentary

Week 13 Pragmatic Conflict Resolution: Solutions to Cultural Conflicts
April 2 Continue preparation for simulation

READ: Mervyn T. Love. 1995. Locating Reconciliation in Terms of Conflict Resolution Theory: An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict Resolution. In Peace Building Through Reconciliation in Northern Ireland Aldershot: Averbury. (pp. 43-66).

Week 14 Simulation exercise, in Class analysis
April 9 Final Paper Due: