

INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT@WORK
Topics in Labor Studies
(Course Number 38:578:610: 90; 37:575:318:90)

Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations
School of Management and Labor Relations
Rutgers - the State University of New Jersey

Fall 2021

Class Times: on-line

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COURSE OVERVIEW

This course offers an in-depth examination of interpersonal conflict in the workplace. Despite the ubiquity of conflict at work and a voluminous literature of theory and practical advice the actual concept remains rather fuzzy. Perhaps this is because there are so many different possibilities for interpersonal conflict to emerge at work. In this course we will review the major theories and read some of the better empirical studies. However, the bulk of the course will be devoted to developing and practicing our interpersonal conflict management skills. Therefore, you will find this course relatively light on reading and heavy on personal assessment, practice and reflection – either in journals or in team discussions. Essentially – theories of conflict while useful are entirely dependent on our ability to manage our own behavior in conflict situations.

This Fall 2021 semester takes place in a historic context in which the topic of conflict in general is particularly salient. We are still dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic consequences. In addition, the dramatic death of George Floyd a year ago has raised the nation's awareness of the legacy of racism and inequality and engendered major cultural conflict – including about what can be taught in our schools. These developments in the larger context have entered our workplace, our family life and our relationships with friends and neighbors. These circumstances provide a compelling reason to focus on our own conflict management competencies. As we will discuss throughout the semester – we cannot change other people's behavior but we can manage our own. Over the course of this semester we will examine most of the major theories of interpersonal conflict and discuss their strengths and weaknesses. Students will assess

your own competencies and styles based on each of the theories. Each student will undertake a “conflict management initiative” in which you practice some new skills. The basic goal of the course is for students to develop and/or improve your own ability to deal with conflict at work effectively.

GRADING POLICY

Our topic is a multifaceted concept with many dimensions. This class is designed to assess your performance on many of these dimensions rather than simply on how well you can master the theoretical content contained in the readings. Class discussions and journal exercises focused on the “Academic” knowledge of the theories are important but putting concepts into practice in real time is the real test. Your performance in class will be evaluated using a point system. You will notice that the elements of the course are distributed across a variety of performance measures so that exams are not the determining factor of grades. Completing all of the assignments is very important in this system as missing one assignment can have a significant negative effect on the final grade. The points for each element of the course as listed below:

Course Component	Points per Assignment	@% of Final Course Grade
Team discussions	20	20
Journal Entries	20	20
Conflict Management Initiative	20	20
Overall contribution to class	10	10
Exam 1	20	20
Exam 2*	10	10
Total	100	100%

*Exam 2 will be optional. If you are happy with your grade by week 13 you may elect to skip it.

You must complete all assignments to receive credit for this course. In terms of the Rutgers University letter grade and grade point average system, your final grade will be calculated as follows:

%	RU Letter Grade
90-100	A
85-89	B+
80-84	B
75-79	C+

70-74	C
60-69	D
Below 60	F

COURSE COMPONENTS

Team discussions (20% of final grade)

You will be assigned to a Team of 4-6 people. Your contributions to team discussions is a key performance indicator of your leadership abilities as well as your academic skills. In order to participate effectively you will need to read all assignments and be prepared to contribute according to the instructions provided including meeting all deadlines.

Journal Entries (20% of final grade)

You will be asked to make a series of journal entries during the course. Journal assignments will ask you to reflect on what you learned from the course material and experiences as well as how you might use the knowledge or insight you gained.

Conflict Management Initiative (20% of final grade)

During the second half of the semester you will be expected to practice your conflict management competencies in an actual setting. Ideally this will be at your workplace however, with the continuation of remote work you may want to choose a face-to-face setting such as a volunteer or community organization, your church. Your team will act as your support group and consultants.

Examination I (20% of final grade)

An exam will be administered near the middle of the course covering the material from the first half of the course. This exam is designed to help you retain, integrate, and deepen your understanding of the ideas we will have explored up to that point in the semester. Make-up examinations are only allowed in the case of documented family, work, and medical emergencies.

Exam 2, (10% of the final grade)

This exam will take place during the final class week and will cover material from the second half of the course. This exam is optional. If you are happy with your grade at Week 13 you can opt out. Exam 2 will *not* be cumulative.

Overall contribution to the Class.

10% of the final grade will be awarded based on your overall performance and contribution: meeting deadlines, effort put forth in journals and team discussions, contributions to your team's discussions and case analysis.

COURSE TEXTBOOK

I have chosen two books as required reading for this course. After reviewing a lot of books in interpersonal conflict I didn't find anything suitable. Many are little more than pop psychology and others are aimed at people studying to be therapists. Consequently, I have selected one classic and one from a distinguished organizational development and change scholar/practitioner. These will be supplemented with assigned readings.

Roger Fisher and William Ury. **Getting to Yes**. 3rd edition. Penguin Books. 2011
Edgar Schein and Peter Schein. **Humble Inquiry**. 2nd edition. Barrett-Koehler. 2021

The Canvas course management system will be used for the administration of this course.

I will rely on Canvas to make general class announcements and to send emails to students as necessary. Therefore, **it is absolutely imperative that you monitor your Canvas mail or arrange to have it forwarded to your personal email account**. I will not be responsible for announcements and email messages that you miss as a result of your not regularly monitoring course email.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Violations of academic integrity are not tolerated in this course or in any course that you take at Rutgers (or any institution of higher learning). Academic dishonesty, committed intentionally or unintentionally, has serious consequences. Please visit Rutgers University's Academic Integrity website at: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/> to learn how you can steer clear of academic integrity violations. The Resources for Students link on the left menu of the homepage is an especially-useful tool for current students.

RUTGERS DISABILITY POLICY

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

CLASS SCHEDULE (a more detailed description of assignments is found on the course site)

Week	Topic	Assignments
1	Introduction and Course Overview	❖ Introductions
2	Documenting your own interpersonal conflict experiences	❖ Ladder of Inference ❖ Inquiry/Advocacy ❖ Week 2 Journal
3	Theories of Interpersonal Conflict	❖ Week 3 Team Discussion
4	Getting to Yes (GtY); Inquiry vs Advocacy	❖ Scheins Preface, Introduction ❖ GtY: Preface to 3 rd and 2 nd editions; Introduction ❖ Week 4 Journal;
5	Conflict and Communication	❖ Scheins, Chapter 1 ❖ GtY, Chapter 1 ❖ Team Discussion: Case Study
6	Interests and Options; Your conflict resolution project	❖ GtY, Chapters 3&3 ❖ Scheins, Chapt 2 ❖ Week 6 Journal
7	Practicing Interests and Options	❖ Team Discussion
8	Preparing your conflict management initiative Exam I	❖ Exam I
9	TBD	❖ Team Discussion
10	TBD	❖ Week 10 Journal

11	TBD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Team Discussion ❖
12		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Individual presentations of your initiative to class ❖ TBA ❖ .Week 12 journal
13	Thanksgiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ TBA
14	Course Wrap up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Exam II ❖ Final Journal and class feedback discussion