Conflict and Governance:

Undergraduate Semester in Dialogue

Fall 2013
The SFU Semester in Dialogue: Conflict and Governance
September-December 2013

DIAL 390, 391, 392 (15 credits)
13 weeks, 20 students
SFU Harbour Centre, Vancouver, BC

Faculty

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Location: SFU Harbour Centre Campus, HC 3050

Time: The program is intensive, meeting five days a week from 10:00-4:00 PM. Note that students are not able to take other courses during the semester, or have employment or other commitments during the course hours.
Course Description

Conflict and contradiction are unavoidable aspects of contemporary life. We encounter conflict everywhere: in ourselves, in small groups, and in every organization in which we are involved, be they an enterprise, club, political party, team, seminar group, business or social movement. We hold beliefs that are inconsistent, we face political or institutional contradictions we cannot resolve but must work with. In something as everyday as sports, we embrace confrontation as part of our lives. How do we arrange or manage this tension and find ways to create conditions within which we can engage conflict positively? How do we create collectives that welcome and thrive on difference?

The governance of modern life, at all scales, is more than anything else the process of managing these conflicts. Conflict management has many objectives: sometimes we try to minimize or resolve it, sometimes we try to put it to good purposes, occasionally we just try to ignore it, but much of the time we try to figure out ways to work with it. From judges to referees to leaders of large institutions; from activists to soldiers to union members: governing ourselves effectively and legitimately requires an understanding of conflict and conflict management. All of these people work in and with less-than-perfectly-harmonious realities. How do they do so? What works and what doesn't? What do they prioritize? How do they make decisions? What institutional structures and methods do they rely on? How do they move past 'mistakes' or obstacles?

Student Learning Outcomes

We hope the students come away with:

- A sense of how the world works, including themselves, their small groupings, their communities, Vancouver, and the world. How are institutions like NGOs or large corporations organized and managed? How are decisions made, and on what basis? How are strikes organized, and how are they resolved?
- Expertise that they can carry forth with them into the world, ranging from the particular to the general, a sense of themselves as having some ability to step into complex situations and facilitate, if not resolve conflict, work with it, as opposed to struggling to contain it.

More Specifically:

-Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Learning

Students learn to:

- Appreciate the complexity of collaboratively defining shared goals for a project
- Demonstrate the ability to recognize a conflict and thoughtfully consider possible responses
- Describe their own learning in reflective writing assignments
- Appreciate the complexities of governance across a range of contexts
- Experience group projects with real deadlines in a real situation
-Appreciate the complexity of collaborative and interdisciplinary projects

-Governing in Conflict
Students learn to:
- Develop an individual project that forms one part of the larger course theme
- Demonstrate the implementation of a major group project related to the theme of conflict and governance
- Investigate individual, local, and global best practices for mediating, facilitating, or even holding conflict with particular focus on the Vancouver context

-Design and Dialogue Process
Students learn to:
- Listen deeply and participate in regular dialogues with guests and each other
- Plan, facilitate, host and report on the implementation of public events
- Apply visualization, information and communication design principles and skills
- Experience action based problem solving scenarios

Assignments and Activities:

Individual:

Reflective journal and reflective responses: keep a regular journal with your reflections/observations concerning how the values, approaches and experiences of the course provide insights into your own personal and professional health. This assignment will not be read or graded, although we will gather them at the end of the course (Friday, Nov. 29th) and we hope you share your observations with the faculty and class. We will ask for 10 weekly (weeks 2 through 11 inclusive) one-page reflections (assigned on Thursday or Friday of the preceding week, due the Tuesday following by 10am) on some aspect of the course, and we will return those to you with feedback.

Conflict and Me: a self-mapping project that runs the duration of the course, an accumulating reflection on the nature of your relations, conflicts, and responses at various scales and in different realms of life. Ideally this will also involve others helping you map yourself critically. There is a three minute “pitch” due on Sept. 18th and a five minute update due on Oct. 16th. This is due on Nov 26th in the final week of class and will be presented in “gallery” form.

First Paragraph: each student will prepare an opening paragraph related to the course theme. Working collaboratively, each anonymous paragraph is reviewed and edited by the entire class and faculty. The assignment demonstrates effective approaches to giving and receiving feedback and constructively supporting one another in writing situations. Due Tuesday, Sept. 10th at 9am (allows time for them to gathered to be used immediately when class begins).
Op-Ed Piece: You will write and submit an article for a daily newspaper. Initially, you will offer a short paragraph and receive feedback, followed by writing and rewriting a 700-word article to submit as an opinion/commentary piece to a major Canadian newspaper. First paragraph will be due Tuesday Oct. 1st by 9am, first full draft due Oct. 25th by 9am, and the final piece is due Nov. 19th.

Walking the Talk: You will propose and implement a significant change in a conflict in your own life, and report back on what you learned through trying to change your practices over the course of the semester.

Final individual project: These projects can vary tremendously. Projects might include: producing a 3000+ word manuscript or equivalent in any other media (ie painting, sculpture, video, audio, multimedia, dance, etc.). Projects prepared in other dialogue courses range from video documentaries, eloquent essays, creative art forms (music cds, paintings, etc.), to factual newspaper / magazine articles. Your work should be relevant to the course theme and suitable for submission to major public outlets such as newspapers, magazines, book publishers, documentary film festivals, television or radio stations, art galleries, or other appropriate venues. Students will be asked pitch their ideas on Oct 10th and will provide an update on November 4th, the final presentation along with accompanying submission is due on November 28th.

In Pairs:

Photos and biographies: students work in pairs to prepare brief biographical sketches of each other. Each 200-word biography is prepared by the other member of each pair and is based on an interview and follow-up discussion with that person. Each completed biography is accompanied with a photo of the person and is emailed to Linda Bannister for posting on the Undergraduate Semester in Dialogue website. Photos will be done on the first day of class and biographies are due by Friday, Sept. 6th at 5pm.

Preparing for Dialogue with Thought Leaders: a pair of students will be assigned to each Thought Leader to prepare a short document circulated to all students electronically a week prior to the guest’s visit. The handout should include a brief biography, a sample of possible questions to lead the dialogue, and, if available, one or two readings on the topic and discussion questions for the Thought Leader. Each pair of students will be responsible for ‘hosting’ the dialogue, this involves connecting in advance with and then greeting and introducing the guest, facilitating the dialogue, and thanking the Thought Leader at the end of the day.

Thought Leader debriefs: a short debrief will be held after most visits, either during or right after lunch.
Small Group:

Growing the Story: A small group role-playing exercise which will help establish norms for the group. This project starts with a case-study and builds into a 2-day roleplaying exercise. Time is class is limited so be prepared for this project to stretch into the evening (Sept 12th). This will happen on Sept. 12th and 13th.

3 Steps of the Big Small Group Project …

A) Situating the Conflict: In their small groups students will select any community (this concept of community is quite expansively construed … please check-in with the class and instructors before leaping too far) in Vancouver with conflicts/arguments/dissensions/forms of governance that draw their attention. They will be asked to write short discussions on the salient positions of either/multiple sides and then discuss what the key stumbling blocks are. This will assist in learning how to listen openly and then encapsulate positions while also developing the ability to take a thoughtful and critical position (e.g. Are these internally consistent and/or comprehensive arguments, what and where are the biases, what are the required and necessary premises, etc.). Groups must be prepared to orient the class to their chosen “community” and present their findings on the morning of October 7th.

B) Power In: In their small groups students will identify and interview 5 important “stakeholders” in their chosen community. These are likely to be people who wield influence on the community and are somewhat representative of the range of positions and opinions surrounding the conflict/s present. They may also be people who are directly involved in the governance processes that are arising. Groups must be prepared to present their findings on the morning of November 1st.

C) Its all about community: In this small group project the students will be asked to map, make sense of, and immerse themselves in a currently functioning Vancouver community (e.g. the Polish community of the Eastside, or the LGBT community, or the world of organized soccer in Surrey). This project is structured around getting a sense of the who/what/how of this community and will assist students in getting a close up sense of how various communities answer important questions of governance. How is the community organized? What are the explicit/implicit rules/systems/modes of governance/conflict resolution? How does this community understand itself? How does it identify its boundaries/limits, and how are friends/threats identified? What is verboten, i.e. tacitly forbidden?) This final project will grow directly out of the first two steps covered above and may build out them in a multiplicity of directions. Each group will have 2 hours to present their community map, conflict, governance scheme, recommendations, etc. to the class. The final project presentation may take many forms. Fields trips are recommended where helpful. Project submission due November 21st … presentations will occur on November 21st and November 25th (if necessary).
Large Group:

**Public Dialogue:** Students choose a topic of broad public interest related to the course theme, and organize, advertise, facilitate, and report on a public dialogue. Students will be responsible for every stage of this event, with input from faculty and thought leaders. The final event will occur during the 11th week of the semester likely on Nov. 13th or 14th. There will be ongoing opportunities to work on this sizeable project and to check in with the various support people available on an ongoing basis throughout the semester. It is a good idea to find these experts and pick their brains!

**Grading and Feedback**

Grading and mentoring will occur at various points throughout the semester. Mentoring will be provided by the instructors (and students) as various assignments emerge. Written assignments will be reviewed and edited in a timely fashion by faculty. Opportunities to revise and resubmit them (as necessary) based on feedback from the instructors will be provided. Oral presentations will be critiqued both in class and privately. Mentoring will be available to all students. It is expected that students will meet with the instructors on a regular basis to discuss projects and any issues relating to the course.

While informal feedback will be provided to students throughout the semester, formal grading will occur in the context of 3 evaluation areas. They are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Areas</th>
<th>Course Number – Letter Grade Assigned for Each Course</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral Presentations, Participation and Hosting of Public Events</td>
<td>DIAL 390</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Project, Reflections, and Tours</td>
<td>DIAL 391</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Project and Final Group Project</td>
<td>DIAL 392</td>
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**Readings**

The approach to general reading assignments is different than that typically associated with undergraduate courses. Students are encouraged to read and digest such information to help build the perspectives that will contribute to the various dialogues in the course. You will be reading for general background knowledge and as aids in developing your individual perspectives, not for detail. Along with the books and the dialogue package assigned for the summer it is likely other readings will appear as necessary throughout the semester.
Field Trips

A number of field trips will occur during the semester. Groups of students will be asked to organize the transportation and events for each trip as necessary. Please refer to schedule for an exact list.

Guests and Dialogue

There will be numerous guests in our classroom throughout the course. Invited guests from diverse professions and organizations will be asked to engage in open and respectful discussions with students about the issues associated with the semester’s focal topic. We intentionally structure the sessions to avoid lecture and question/answer format and encourage conversations in which students are interacting fully with guests. These experiences are designed to teach skills in “reading the room,” hearing a variety of perspectives, and respectfully sharing your own views.

Confirmed Guests and Thought Leaders Fall 2013:
(N.B. It is likely that other guests will appear along the way)

Tamara Pearl, formerly with Peace it Together
Chief Robert Joseph, Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Glen Sigurdson, Arbitrator
Andrea Reimer, City Councilor
Larry Beasley, City Planner
Cal Chrustie, Police Officer
Brenda Morrison, Restorative Justice
Ken Lum, Artist
Peter Ladner (Fellow in Dialogue), Former City Councilor
Larry Green, Psychologist
Nancy Cameron, Family Mediator and Collaborative Lawyer
Tony Penikett, Arbitrator, former Premier of the Yukon
Bram Tovey, Conductor
Julian Griggs, Facilitator/Educator
Tzeporah Berman, Environmental Advocates
David Ebby, BC Civil Liberties Association
Diana Juricvic, BC Human Rights Tribunal
Dave Fushtey, Centre for Dialogue Fellow, Principled Governance Project
Vince Verlaan, Community Engagement Facilitator
Paul Meyer, Centre for Dialogue Fellow, International Security
Robert Daum, Rabbi, Director Iona Pacific Inter-Religious Centre