

## Conflict Transformation Skills (INTD 1259) Winter 2024 Syllabus

To transform conflict, we must first understand the nature of conflict and then develop tools to build healthy relationships and communities – locally, nationally, and globally. This course will introduce students to a variety of approaches to conflict transformation (CT), including mediation, restorative practices, and structured dialogue. All these ways of perceiving conflict play a crucial role in the way we think across boundaries in the midst of difficult disagreements. Building our skills for constructively engaging in conflict can help us in our educational, professional, and civic lives.

The course is structured around three questions: *What is conflict? Who am I in conflict? What skills and dispositions can help transform conflicts?* These questions line up with the three key learning outcomes for the Conflict Transformation (CT) Collaborative at Middlebury: (1) new understandings of conflict as potentially productive, (2) the willingness to better understand self and others (perspective taking), and (3) a commitment to action (to not just see conflict differently but do conflict differently).

### COURSE STRUCTURE

Our goal is to provide opportunities to learn about, practice, and reflect on new understandings and new skills in conflict. We will explore various constructive approaches to conflict, experiment with new practices, assess their efficacy, and reflect on what you have learned in the process.

We meet Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 9:30 am - 12:30 pm. We have two sections, A (Axinn 2019) and B (Axinn 220). We will often start together in Axinn 219. We will have several additional meetings and will offer advance notice of these requirements.

The course instructors are [Sarah Stroup](#) and [Julian Portilla](#). For office hours, come see Stroup on Mondays 2-4 pm during community hours at the CT Collaborative offices in Marbleworks 203. Reach out to either of us for additional appointment times.

### COURSE POLICIES

We have built a structure that will hopefully invite engagement, generosity, and a sense of play, while building in mechanisms for critical reflection. We share responsibility for the quality of our conversations together!

- *Guidelines for discussion:* we will decide these together at the start of the term. Some common principles for enhancing wide-ranging and respectful dialogue: listen to understand, share air time, assume goodwill, speak for yourself rather than on behalf of others, and share responsibility for the conversation.
- *Accessibility:* If you need accommodation for disabilities, please meet with one of us during office hours by 1/10 and we will make a plan to ensure full access and participation.
- *Academic Honesty:* We are all held to the College Honor Code and Academic Honesty Statement. Violations - cheating, falsification, fabrication, or plagiarism – will endanger the credit you earn in this course.

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

As a course in which we are seeking to learn about and practice new skills for constructive engagement in conflict, the most important outcome of this course is that *you have demonstrated effort in using new skills and reflected on their efficacy*. To get an “A” in this course, be prepared, be willing to experiment, and show that you have reflected on the reading and practice. You will earn your grade through completion of the following:

15 points	Interpersonal Conflict Exercise
15 points	Practice session attendance and reflection (either 1/11 or 1/16)
60 points	Six additional writing reflections (10 points each)
10 points	Participation

**1. Attendance and participation:** Please attend all sessions! Personal obligations and illnesses arise, so if something comes up, please let us know in advance and add 200 words to your next writing response. More than two absences will require an office hours meeting.

**2. Interpersonal conflict exercise:** We will practice using new tools to engage in a conflict in a different way. You will identify an interpersonal conflict (family, friend, colleague) and use a specific question or tool from the reading to engage with that person in a different way. After doing so, write up the conflict, your approach, and a reflection on the outcome (400-500 words).

**3. Additional practice session:** The focus of this class is skill-building. In addition to the many exercises in our regular meeting time, we will ask you to join in some special practice sessions.

- Each of you should **choose one** of the following:
  - 1/11, 2-5 pm, Hilary Mullins will lead a “communication in conflict” workshop. RSVP [here](#).
  - 1/16, 9:30-12:30, MAC Dance Theater: the “Body in Conflict” series features an interactive workshop focused on creativity and collaboration. RSVP [link here](#).
- On 1/24-25, United Nations senior mediation advisor Francisco Diez will lead us through mediation training. **Please note:** we will meet from 9:30-11:30 and 1-3 pm on both days.

**4. Writing responses:** Over the course of the winter term, you will write seven reflective essays. These are opportunities to digest the fast-moving class discussion, suggest an additional insight, or raise themes that require more attention.

- Length and Style: we have suggested word lengths in each prompt. You can write more (happy to give feedback!), but poor editing & weak structure will hurt you, not help you. We will not share any personal information that you divulge, but will assess you as a college writer. This is a short essay to a professor, not a text to your roommate.
- Assessment: These reflective responses are a chance to unpack the questions that you might have, the issues that made you uncomfortable, the connections to conflicts that you care about, and much more. To earn full points, (1) specifically reference readings (quotes require author, year, and page), and (2) use specific details from class or your personal experience (nothing so generic that it could have been written by ChatGPT).

- Starting a reflection can be tough! A few examples of topic sentences for a writing response:
  - Schirch and Campt (2010, p23) suggest that a diversity of experiences is important for dialogue, but our class discussion revealed some challenges...
  - Stone, Patton, and Heen (2010, p114)'s warning to avoid "all or nothing thinking" reminded me of a something came up in a conflict I had with...
  - Martin (2018) highlights the role of breath in regulating the body's response to conflict. I notice that my physical response to conflict is....

<b>due by Friday, 1/5</b>	Describe a conflict you care about - and one that you are willing to talk about in class. Can you see examples of high conflict and good conflict in the dispute? What do you wish the other person/party knew about the way you feel and see things? Do you have any doubts about your own behavior in the conflict, and why? (300-400 words)
<b>due by Friday, 1/12</b>	Describe a key idea from one or more of the readings from week 1 and connect it to a discussion that emerged in class (300-400 words).
<b>due by Tuesday, 1/16</b>	interpersonal conflict exercise (see Canvas)
<b>due by Friday, 1/19</b>	Describe one key practice in structured dialogue from the reading. Have you seen it applied in some context? If not, can you see a place it might be used? (300-400 words).
<b>due by Monday, 1/22</b>	Consider the work you did in your additional practice session [either communication in conflict or embodied conflict]. How does that practice speak to one of the following: critical self-awareness, creativity, curiosity, risk taking, or working in relationships with others? (300-400 words).
<b>due by Friday, 1/26</b>	How did your experience in the mediation chair (Diez workshops) compare with the theory (see readings)? What were some of the key decisions you made, and what was your reasoning for making those decisions? (300-400 words).
<b>due by Friday, 2/2</b>	Describe one concept or example from the readings on systemic change. How does this advance your thinking about different levels of transformation - interpersonal, social/organizational, and structural? (300-400 words).
<b>due by Friday, 2/2</b>	If a friend asks you over the break about one skill you learned this term, what will you identify as particularly useful, and why? (300-400 words).

**I. What is Conflict? Who Am I in Conflict?**

**1/4 (Th) Introduction and Welcome**

*Suggested:* Either a reading or podcast from Amanda Ripley  
Selections from *High Conflict* (Simon and Schuster, 2021): 1-19, 237-274.  
“Stepping...into ‘good conflict’,” *OnBeing*, February 9, 2023 ([link](#)).

**1/8 (M) What is Conflict**

Bruce Dayton and Louis Kriesberg, Chapter 2, *Constructive Conflicts*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition  
(Rowman and Littlefield, 2022): 29-53.  
John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination* (Oxford, 2005): 3-40, 151-162.

**1/10 (W) Communication in Conflict**

**Hilary Mullins, guest**

Selection from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and reflection (see Canvas)  
Arthur Brooks, “Why we hate our political enemies,” *PBSNewshour*, July 2019 ([link](#)).  
Loretta Ross, “Don’t call people out -call them in,” *TED Talk*, August 4, 2021 ([link](#)).  
Julia Minson, “To be heard, listen,” *SPSP Blog*, March 18, 2022 ([link](#)).  
*Optional:* Sharon S Ellison, *Taking the War out of our Words* (Voices of Integrity, 2016).

**1/11 (Th) Critical Self-Awareness**

Bernard Mayer, Ch 2, *The Dynamics of Conflict* (Wiley, 2012): 33-66.  
Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen, “Ground Your Identity,” in *Difficult Conversations* (Penguin, 2010): 112-128.  
Leonard Riskin, “Knowing Yourself: Mindfulness,” *The Negotiator’s Fieldbook* (ABA, 2006): 239-250.  
Please complete the Conflict Styles Assessment (based on TKI) ([link](#))

**1/11 (Th) optional communication workshop, 2-5 pm**

**Hilary Mullins**

Sign up [in this Google sheet](#)

**II. Skills and Dispositions for Constructive Conflict**

**1/15 (M) no class - MLK Jr Holiday**

**1/16 Interpersonal conflict exercise due**

**1/16 optional workshop on embodied conflict**

**with SLM Dances**

RSVP [link here](#)

**1/17 (W) Dialogue I**

Lisa Schirch and David Campt, *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects* (Good Books, 2007): 1-29.

Bailey Oliver-Blackburn and April Chatham-Carpenter, “‘But I don’t know if I want to talk to you’,” *Journal of Allied Communication Research* (2022): 1-17.

*optional:* for more on MFT, see Graham et al. (2013): 58-71 ([link](#)).

**1/18 (Th) Dialogue II: Israel and Palestine**

ZD Gurevitch, “The Power of Not Understanding,” *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 25:2 (M161-173).

Ezra Klein, “Primer on Israeli-Palestinian Peace Efforts,” *The Ezra Klein Show*, November 21, 2023 ([link](#)).

**1/22 (M) Negotiation**

Fisher and Ury, *Getting to Yes* (Simon and Schuster, 2011): Parts I and II (1-95).

William Ury, “The Maestro of Mediation,” *The Negotiators*, November 21, 2023 ([link](#)).

Water Rights in Mexico v the US, *The Negotiators*, Oct 24, 2023 ([link](#)).

Inside the secret talks...exchange with Iran, *The Negotiators*, Nov 2, 2021 ([link](#)).

**1/24 (W) Mediation I (9:30-11:30)**

**Francisco Diez, guest**

Baruch, Bush, and Joseph Folger. *The Promise of Mediation: Responding to Conflict through Empowerment and Recognition*. (Jossey-Bass, 2005): 7-40.

Chris Moore, Chapters 2, 9, *The Mediation Process*, (Wiley, 2014): 43-81, 232-251.

*optional:* example of mediation session from Susan Terry ([link here](#)).

**1/24 (W) Mediation II (1-3 pm)**

**1/25 (Th) Mediation III (9:30-11:30)**

Winslade, John, and Gerald Monk. *Narrative Mediation: A New Approach to Conflict Resolution*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2001, pp. 31-56.

Robert Baruch Bush, and Joseph Folger. *The Promise of Mediation: Responding to Conflict through Empowerment and Recognition*. (Jossey-Bass, 2005), 41-84.

**1/25 (Th) Mediation IV (1-3 pm)**

**1/29 (M) Systemic Conflict: Theories of Change**

Mary Anderson and Lara Olson, *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners* (Collaborative for Development Action, 2003): 1-26, 45-75 ([link](#)).  
Julia Palmiano Federer et al., *Beyond the Tracks? Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes* (ETH Zurich, December 2019): 4-10 ([link](#)).  
Baratunde Thurston, "To End Conflict, we must transform it," *How to Citizen*, March 30, 2023 ([link](#)).

**1/31 (W)      Justice: from individuals to societies      sujatha baliga, guest**

Howard Zehr, *Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Good Books, 2002): 1-57.  
"An example of restorative justice with sujatha baliga," *WorldTrust TV*, July 6, 2016 ([link](#)).  
Bronwyn Leebaw, "Legitimation or Judgment? South Africa's Restorative Approach to Transitional Justice," *Polity* 34.1 (2003): 23-51.  
*listen to at least one of the following:*  
Ear Hustle, "Episode 36: Tell Christy I Love Her," October 16, 2019 ([here](#)).  
Bianca Giaever, "Forgiveness," *Transom*, September 5, 2012 ([here](#)).  
Hector Black, "Forgiveness," *TheMoth.org* April 16, 2012 ([here](#)).  
Snap Judgment, silver dollar lounge KKK Daryl Davis. [Here](#).  
Snap Judgment: [Absolution](#) episode on Snap Judgment.  
Derek Black and Matthew Stevenson, "Befriending Radical Disagreement," *OnBeing*, May 17, 2018 ([here](#)).

**2/1 (Th)      Strategic Thinking: Building Coalitions**

Anand Giridharadas, *The Persuaders* (Knopf, 2022): 40-56.  
Joshua Kalla and David Broockman, "Reducing Exclusionary Attitudes through Interpersonal conversation," *APSR* 114:2 (2020): 410-425.  
Avant, Berry, Chenoweth, Epstein, Hendrix, Kaplan, and Sisk, eds, *Civil Action and the Dynamics of Violence* (Oxford, 2019): 1-27, 279-294.