

## **Confronting Our Differences, Discovering Our Similarities**

### **SIS 220, Fall 2011**

**Mondays and Thursdays, 4:00 – 5:15 pm  
Ward 303**

**Professor Margaret E. Smith**

**International Peace and Conflict Resolution  
School of International Service  
American University**

Office for office hours: East Quad 206  
Office hours: Tuesday 3-5 or by appointment  
Office Phone: 202-885-1564; Mobile: 202-403-1352  
Email: [mesmith@american.edu](mailto:mesmith@american.edu)

***From the catalogue:***

This course on conflict resolution examines our interdependent world and fosters greater intercultural awareness and communication. It encourages students to explore their own sense of identity, attitudes and behavioral choices, and how they affect and are affected by differences and similarities encountered with others.

***Course summary:***

This is a course about community building. The first half of the course explores personal and group dynamics that affect intergroup understanding: personal and social identity, culture, and the ways that we tend to form generalizations about groups that can, at best, be inaccurate or, at worst, create serious conflict.

The second half of the course focuses on aspects of community building. We look at cases of group conflict in Nigeria and Kenya, and examine how facilitators there developed bridgebuilding approaches. We then discuss a variety of approaches such as contact programs, building social capital, finding superordinate goals, dialogue, walk through history, apology, and teambuilding. The culmination of the course is a chance to apply these ideas in a community-building project.

### ***Course Objectives***

This course will

- Sharpen your understanding of how people's sense of identity is constructed.
- Demonstrate how it is that people behave differently in groups than when they act on their own.
- Help you gain appreciation for aspects of the identity of social groups that are different from your own.
- Show you why it is that group difference easily contributes to conflict escalation
- Stimulate you to think about ways you can become a community builder wherever you are.
- Teach you about strategies for community building projects

### ***Learning Outcomes***

In fulfilling the requirements of this course you will learn to

- Understand and better articulate your own personal and social identity
- Understand the diversity of identities within the classroom community
- Learn concepts, terms and frameworks for analyzing ways personal and social identity contribute to interpersonal and intergroup understanding, on the one hand, and conflict, on the other
- Practice communication strategies that assist greater understanding of those different from yourself
- Apply analytical tools to a case study of a political conflict
- Recognize and apply potential community building strategies including dialogue, contact programs, social capital, superordinate goals, walk through history, apology, teambuilding

### ***Relevance of the course SIS students:***

The conclusions we draw about others (and ourselves) are often based on – at best – an incomplete understanding of identity questions. This lack of understanding can cause needless group conflict, political manipulation, and faulty policymaking. At the local, national and international levels, the consequences can be catastrophic, as seen in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Iraq and Afghanistan and many other places.

Ethnic conflict is not the only issue of importance related to cultural and ethnic identity, although it is often the most urgent. Long before the explosive ethnic conflicts of the 1980s and 1990s, questions concerning the creation of a state for a particular group (or groups) of people have been dominating the agenda of the international law and politics. Identity and nationalism are critical for understanding claims to sovereignty, autonomy and self-determination. However, questions of identity also permeate intelligent discussions on a wide range of topics, including refugee status, immigration, citizenship, human and civil rights, religious freedom, education, constitutional matters, UN peacekeeping, humanitarian intervention, and human security.

When we learn how to confront our differences openmindedly and safely, we can also benefit from the discovery of our similarities across identity groups. Most contemporary thinkers about identity believe that a general conception of human ‘sameness’ really hides ignorance about valid differences and vital uniqueness. The ‘we’re all the same’ school of thought may, in the end, just be another form of ethnocentrism that prevents us from according more legitimacy to ourselves and each other. Yet we *do* have similarities and meeting points, and experience is clearly the best guide as we try to discover what these are.

***Course methodology:***

The course will be run as a seminar, relying to a great extent on your ability to master the readings and course concepts and demonstrate your learning (including your exploration, doubts and concerns) in class. You are expected to contribute intelligently and reflectively from your experience and the readings. The instructor will elaborate on critical concepts and ask questions. As well as ‘plenary’ sessions, the course will include small group discussions and some simulations to maximize participation.

***Requirements:***

**1. Participation – 15%**

- This includes attendance. More than three classes missed could result in a deduction of three points out of the 20 points for participation in your overall grade. Please inform me before class if you have legitimate reasons for missing a class.
- Response to readings and class discussion. Assessment of your contributions to the class interaction will be based on quality and appropriateness. Please see me if you are finding that you are not getting as much chance to speak as you would like.
- Contributions to group work and simulations.

**2. Reflective paper on your own exploration of identity – 10% – Due September 19.**

- A preliminary portion of this assignment is due the second day of class.
- 1,750 words, or about seven pages, double spaced.

**3. Participation in the American University Dialogue series – 25%**

**This is optional. See below for your other options.**

Class members are encouraged to take part in one of four dialogue groups focusing on social identities and differences, such as race and ethnic relations (exact topics will be provided by the first day of class.) The seven sessions will be about 2 hours in length, beginning the week of September 19<sup>th</sup>. This dialogue opportunity is being organized by the Dialogue Development Group (DDG) with the goal of overcoming social alienation and fragmentation on campus by connecting diverse individuals and groups through meaningful and respectful dialogue. The graduate student members of the DDG have participated in dialogue, have completed the IPCR course in Dialogue Approaches and

Application, and have taken a Skills Institute in Facilitation Skills and Processes. They will work during the Fall semester under the supervision of IPCR faculty.

In addition to consistent participation in the dialogue sessions, class members are expected to comment on the dialogue process and reflect upon their experience in their weekly journal entries and in a three page papers submitted to Prof Smith by November 28.

Members of this group will visit the class within the first couple of weeks of the semester to explain more.

**OR**

**Participation in American University's TALK program**, convened by the office of International Student and Scholar Services, which brings U.S. and international students together to engage in formal facilitated conversations about culture and intercultural communication. Email [TALK@american.edu](mailto:TALK@american.edu) for questions. Applications are available online at <http://american.edu/ocl/iss/talk-student-application.cfm>

**Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. on Monday, September 5th.**

In addition to consistent participation, class members who choose this option are asked to keep a journal of their experiences and summarize this in a three page paper to be submitted to Prof. Smith November 28.

**OR**

**Non Violent Communication workshop offered by Tarek Maassrani (if available)**  
I will confirm the availability of this option as soon as possible.

**OR**

**Research paper – 25 % - Due November 21.**

- A research paper on a topic to be defined by you and Prof. Smith, but focusing on identity issues.
- The text of this paper must be 3,000 – 3,500 words (i.e. 12-14 double spaced pages) and in addition the paper must include a bibliography and notation.
- I will hold a separate session with those doing the paper to discuss how to approach it.

**4. A modest group project related to the book *Better Together*, that you will do with two others in the class - 10% - Presented to the class on various days in November.**

**5. Mid-term exam –20% – October 17.**

- Covering various terminologies and debates that have emerged in the first half of the semester.
- A study guide will be provided.

**6. Final paper/exam – 20% – Due December 15, 5pm in my mailbox in the SIS office.**

- A take home paper that will ask you to write an essay responding to issues raised in the course. The paper needs to demonstrate that you understand concepts that have been discussed in class during the semester.

**More precise guidelines for assignments will be provided closer to the time the assignment is due.**

***Unauthorized incompletes (not turning in your paper) are simply graded as F.***

***Please see me ahead of time if you are likely to have difficulty turning in a paper on time so we can agree on an appropriate plan.***

***Plagiarism will result automatically in failure, potential damage to academic standing and other consequences.***

***Use of laptops will not be permitted in class.***

***Required readings:***

Three books are required for this course and can be purchased at the AU bookstore:

Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to discuss what matters most* (New York: Penguin, 1999). ISBN: 01402.8852X

Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein, *Better Together* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003).

Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue*,

Other articles assigned in the syllabus will be found on E-Reserves or directly on the class Blackboard site after the first week of classes.

**ALL STUDENTS MUST ADHERE TO THE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE**

<http://www.american.edu/provost/registrar/regulations/reg80.cfm>

As the code states,

"By enrolling at American University and then each semester when registering for classes, students acknowledge their commitment to the Code. As members of the academic community, students must become familiar with their rights and their responsibilities. In each course, they are responsible for knowing the requirements and restrictions regarding research and writing, examinations of whatever kind, collaborative work, the use of study aids, the appropriateness of assistance, and other issues. Students are responsible for learning the conventions of documentation and acknowledgment of sources. American University expects students to complete all examinations, tests, papers, creative projects, and assignments of any kind according to the highest ethical standards, as set forth either explicitly or implicitly in this Code or by the direction of instructors."

**EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), or natural disaster, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community.

Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency.

Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies.

In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site ([www.prepared.american.edu](http://www.prepared.american.edu)) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.

## *Syllabus*

### **I. COMMUNITY and IDENTITY**

***1. August 29 – What questions about difference are on your mind? What does the word community mean to you? Are you interested in building community? Why or why not? What do we hope for when we speak of community? Why is community difficult to create? What models do you have in your mind when you think of community?***

***2. September 1 - Who are we in this class? How did we acquire our sense of identity? Can it change over time? Why is it important to us?***

What elements do we draw upon when we discuss our sense of self or identity?  
Personal identity versus social identity. Why does our identity cause conflict?

#### ***Assignment:***

Bring to class a drawing that captures the many aspects of your sense of who you are. Be prepared to talk about this drawing. You can use color and shape to draw attention to the fact that some aspects of your identity are more important than others, or that some overlap. There is no “right” way to do this, so have fun being as creative as you can. You may label elements of the diagram, but it should depend more on graphics than text.

#### **Reading:**

Walker Percy, “A Short Quiz” in *Making Contact: readings from home and abroad*, C. Verberg, Bedford/St. Martin’s, Boston. 1997. (Posted on the class Blackboard site)

***!! Note that Monday, September 5, is a university holiday !!***

### **II. THE SELF AND THE OTHER**

***3. September 8 - The “Other”***

***What special role does “the other” play when we are defining ourselves? What do we mean by in-group and out-group?***

Who is “the other” for you? Do you have permanent others, temporary others, family others? What happens when you start speaking about these others to someone else? What does it feel like to be othered? What do we mean by marginalization? What does the other need from me? What do I need from the other?

#### **Reading:**

Cornel West, “Race Matters” in *Making Contact: readings from home and abroad*, C. Verberg, Bedford/St. Martin’s, Boston, 1997. (Class Blackboard site)

William Gudykunst, “Understanding Group Differences,” Chapter 3 in *Bridging Differences*. Pp 74-77. (Class Blackboard site)

*Difficult Conversations*, xxvii-20.

**4. September 12– Identity as story**

***How does your story reveal who you are?***

What do we mean by narrative? How might we listen to people’s stories in new ways?

***What do Stone, Patton and Heen mean by the Contribution System?***

***What does it mean to “move from blame to contribution”?***

Reading:

*Difficult Conversations*, pages 21-82.

**5. September 15 - Emotions and identity**

***What do we mean by “emotional footprint”? What deeper questions lie at the heart of the “identity conversation”?***

Reading:

*Difficult Conversations*, pages 83-128.

***Assignment:***

Come to class prepared to describe a situation in which you felt misunderstood. It does not matter for this exercise whether it ended well or badly. The point is to be able to speak about this incident from the standpoint of what happened, how you felt about what happened, and how this incident demonstrated a challenge to your sense of self, or to your personal values.

**6. September 19 - The Learning Conversation**

***What are the essential elements of the Learning Conversation? How does all this good advice strike you? Do you have experiences of trying any of these strategies?***

Reading:

*Difficult Conversations*, pages 130-end.

First assignment due – essay on your identity.

**III. THE SPECIAL NATURE OF THE GROUP**

**7. September 22– What is social identity?**

Which groups that you belong to do you evaluate negatively or positively? Which groups are most important to the way you define yourself?

Reading:

William Gudykunst, “Understanding Group Differences,” Chapter 3 in *Bridging Differences*. Pp 77-85; 91-97; skim 97-108

**8. September 29 - What is culture?**

***What is the difference between social identity and cultural identity? Which comes first? How does culture affect our understanding of others? How do cultural groups form?***

Reading:

Dennis O'Neill *Human Culture*

<http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/Default.htm>

“What is culture?” “Characteristics of Culture” “Methods for Learning about Culture”

**9. October 3– Social categorization**

What special tendencies emerge from our inclination to categorize the world that have an effect on promoting conflict?

Reading:

Marilynn Brewer, “From Basic Psychological Processes to Intergroup Behaviour,” Chapter One in *Intergroup Relations* – Second Edition (Philadelphia: Open University Press 2003), pp. 1-9.

Herb Kelman, “The Place of Ethnic Identity in the Development of Personal Identity: A Challenge for the Jewish Family,” in *Coping with Life and Death: Jewish Families in the Twentieth Century*, The Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pages 3-end.

**10. October 6 – Ethnocentrism – the need for belonging**

Polarization, In-group favoritism, Deprivation, Justice, Cooperation, and Competition as factors in our tendency to foster group identity

Reading:

Marilynn Brewer, “Ethnocentrism and In-group Identity: The Need for ‘We-ness,’” Chapter Two in *Intergroup Relations* – Second Edition (Philadelphia: Open University Press 2003), pp. 20-32.

**11. October 10 - Attribution –How we perceive the causes of certain events**

We interpret the environment in ways that promote the best self image

The fundamental attribution theory; The ultimate attribution theory

Reading:

Marilynn Brewer, “From Basic Psychological Processes to Intergroup Behaviour,” Chapter One in *Intergroup Relations* – Second Edition (Philadelphia: Open University Press 2003), pp. 9-12.

**12. October 13- Midterm review**

**13. October 17 – Midterm exam**

#### **IV. GROUP DYNAMICS AT THE POLITICAL LEVEL**

##### ***14. October 20 – Religious difference in Nigeria***

What role is religious difference playing in Nigerian society? Is it about social distinction or creedal disagreement?

We will watch the movie “The Imam and the Pastor” in class.

As you watch this film about a Nigerian Muslim Imam and Christian Pastor, think about the reasons for the divisions these two men experienced. What questions about community building does this story raise for you?

##### **Reading:**

Uzoma, Rose C. “Religious Pluralism, Cultural Differences and Social Stability in Nigeria.” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2004.

##### ***15. October 24 – Ethnic and tribal difference in Kenya***

Pastor James and Imam Ashefa were asked to bring their conflict resolution skills to bear in Kenya in 2008 following the serious violence that broke out in Kenya after the December 2007 elections. We will watch a new movie “An African Answer” about their work in Kenya.

##### **Reading:**

Peter Kagwanja & Roger Southall (2009) “Introduction: Kenya – A democracy in retreat?” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 27:3, 259-277

##### ***16. October 27- Responding to communal tensions and violence***

Pastor James and Imam Ashefa will visit the class. Please have your questions ready for them about their work in Kenya and Nigeria.

#### **V. APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY BUILDING**

##### ***17. October 31 – Social Capital***

Bring your copy of *Better Together* to class. We will create class teams to study the various chapters of the book. Teams will report back to class on what they have learned that could be useful to us all with regard to strategies for building social capital and trust.

##### **Reading:**

Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein, *Better Together*, “Introduction.”

Paul S. Adler and Seok-Woo Kwon, “Social Capital: Prospects for a New Concept,” *Academy of Management Review* 2002, Vol. 27, No. 1, 17-40.

(This article has much more detail than you need, but as you skim through it, find a definition of “social capital” that works for you, and be prepared to talk about it in class.)

**18. November 3 – Social Trust**

**Assignment:** Find an article online relating to the subject of “social trust” or “trust.” Be prepared to pool ideas about this concept and how it relates to the concerns of this course.

Reading:

Brad Reid, “The Importance of Social Trust,” The Huffington Post: 7/7/11 03:13 PM ET

**19. November 7 – Does contact create understanding? Under what circumstances?**

We will explore the “contact hypothesis.”

Reading:

Thomas Pettigrew, “Intergroup Contact Theory.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 1998 (49):65-85.

Dana Bramel, “The Strange Career of the Conflict Hypothesis,” *The Psychology of Ethnic and Cultural Conflict, (Psychological Dimensions to War and Peace)* Yueh-Ting Lee, Clark McCauley ), Fathali Moghaddam , and Stephen Worchel, Eds. Westport: Praeger, 2004

**20. November 10 – What is Dialogue?**

How does Yankelovic describe the difference among dialogue, debate, deliberation and discussion? What makes dialogue special? Before speaking about planned dialogue, the author demonstrates how dialogue skills can be brought surreptitiously into ordinary conversations. What are his suggestions for this? How do his suggestions compare with the “learning conversation” we spoke about earlier in the semester?

Reading:

Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue*, Chapters 1-5; pp. 1-89.  
(Note particularly the strategies that the author has highlighted.)

**21. November 14 – Dialogue in the broader culture**

Chapters 7 and 8 give an excellent summary of guidelines for successful dialogue. Which of these ideas strike you as unexpected? Which ones strike you as particularly difficult? Do you expect dialogue, when attempted in situations of cultural difference, will be more challenging? Why?

Reading:

Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue*, Chapters 6-9; pp. 90-158.

**22. November 17 – Dialogue as community building**

How does the author extend his argument about dialogue to issues of American national life? What does he mean by the “soul of America”?

Reading:

Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue*, Chapters 10-14; pp. 159-218.

***23. November 21 – Walk Through History***

***How does “walking through history” enable us to live into the story of the other?***

We will watch a movie of a community relations project in Richmond, Virginia where people actually walked to the places associated with the painful past in order to find community healing.

***24. November 28 - Apology***

Research papers or papers responding to DDG and TALK are due.

***25. December 1- Teamwork and teambuilding***

***26. December 5 – Project Development***

***The assignment for the final paper will be given out in class on this day, and we will discuss various approaches to writing this paper.***

***27. December 8 – Pulling it all together***

***Revisiting the concepts of the course.***

**December 15, 5 pm. Final paper due.**