Syllabus: ECS 5103  
Research Methods in Conflict Studies  
Fall 2012

Time: Wednesdays, 8:30-11:30  
Room: TBD  
Instructor: Paul Minard  
Telephone number: TBD  
Office hours: Thursdays, 4:00pm-6:00pm  
Note: No office hours during the study break (21-27 October)  
Email address: paulminard@gmail.com

Course description  
This course introduces students to practical, theoretical and ethical issues involved in carrying out and assessing research on conflict. It aims to develop essential skills for conducting and evaluating original, primarily qualitative research in the social sciences in general, and in the field of conflict studies in particular.

Learning objectives and approach  
This course is organized in two parts:  
- Part I: Researching conflict: A critical introduction  
- Part II: Designing and conducting research on conflict issues: From theory to practice

By the end of this course, students should be able to:  
- Understand the principles of sound research in the social sciences;  
- Appreciate and engage in theoretical and ethical debates on the conduct of social science research, particularly in the field of conflict studies;  
- Critically analyze different research methods and methodologies, and by extension the research findings presented in secondary sources;  
- Understand and apply a variety of tools, techniques and approaches used in qualitative social science research;  
- Identify compelling research problems; and  
- Develop appropriate research designs to investigate such problems.

The teaching and learning methods that will be used to achieve these objectives include:  
- Brief lectures to introduce key theoretical and conceptual issues;  
- Class and small group discussions;  
- Student presentations; and  
- Extensive reading and guided independent secondary research.

Required readings  
Required readings are identified below and collated in the course pack, available for purchase at Rytec Printers, 404 Dalhousie Street, Tel: (613) 241-2679. Key texts will also be available on reserve at the Saint Paul University.

Optional readings and additional resources are also suggested below.

Important dates  
5 September      Course begins  
26 September      Short essay due

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1 The content of this syllabus is indebted to Dr. Megan Bradley (2011).  
2 ECS 2112 offers an introduction to quantitative methods in conflict studies.
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10 October  Deadline for confirmation of research proposal topic (by email)
24 October   No class (study break)
31 October   Literature review due
14, 21, 28 November  Oral presentations of research proposals
5 December  Last class, research proposals due

Assignments and evaluation
10%  Participation in class
10%  Short essay
20%  Literature review
15%  Team presentation analyzing a piece of research relevant to conflict studies
5%   Presentation of research proposal
40%  Research proposal

Further information on the assignments and evaluation criteria is available at the end of the syllabus.

Recommended general resources


Program

Part I: Researching conflict: A critical introduction

Class 1: Wednesday 5 September 2012

Introduction to course
- Students’ and professor’s expectations
- Course approach:
  - Multi- and inter-disciplinary approach
  - Linkages between theory and practice
  - Student participation
- Format and logistics
- Class topics and presentations
- Assessment

Introduction to research methods in conflict studies
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- Why is research important?
  - Pursuit of knowledge: Research for academic purposes
  - Research for practical programming needs, advocacy and policy change

- Why are research methods important?
  - ‘Validity’ of research findings and conclusions
  - Power and politics in research, particularly in peace and conflict settings

Suggested readings


Class 2: Wednesday 12 September 2012

Theoretical approaches and debates

Key themes

- Epistemological approaches: Rationalism and empiricism
- Theoretical paradigms: Positivist, interpretive, constructionist, critical
- Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods
- Participatory methodologies

Required reading


Optional reading and additional resources


Class 3: Wednesday 19 September 2012
Power, politics and research: Ethical dimensions of research on conflict

Key themes
- Examples of ethically questionable research practices and ethical guidelines for social science research
  - Informed consent
- Reflexivity
- Power dynamics
- Researchers as advocates
- Expectations and compensation
- Reciprocity and sustainability

Required reading

Optional reading and additional resources

Part II: Designing and conducting research on conflict issues: From theory to practice

Class 4: Wednesday 26 September 2012
Research questions and research designs

Note: Short essay due.

Key themes
- Research purpose
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- Which questions are important? The politics of research agendas
  - Feminist research methodologies
- Literature reviews
- Concepts
- Basic principles of sampling and comparative analysis

Team presentation #1: Feminist research methodologies

Required reading

Optional reading and additional resources
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Class 5: Wednesday 3 October 2012
Introduction to fieldwork, case studies and interviewing

Key themes
- Fieldwork logistics
  - Affiliation
  - Timing
  - Access and timing issues in the field
- Case studies
  - Uses of case studies
  - Case study selection
- Open-ended, semi-structured and structured interviews
  - Ethics and power relations in interviewing

Guest speaker: Teague Lamarche

Team presentation #2: Interviews

Required reading

Optional reading and additional resources
Fieldwork

Case studies
Class 6: Wednesday 10 October 2012

Oral histories/narrative interviews, focus groups and surveys

Note: Deadline for confirming research proposal topic (by email).

Key themes
- Oral histories and narrative interviews
- Survey design and implementation
- Challenges and opportunities of focus group discussions

Guest speaker: Professor Anna Sheftel

Team presentation #3: Life histories/narrative interviews

Required reading

Optional reading and additional resources

Oral histories/narrative interviews

Focus groups

Surveys
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Class 7: Wednesday 17 October 2012

Ethnographic techniques

Key themes
- Ethnographic techniques
  - Observation/participant observation

Team presentation #4: Ethnography

Required reading

Optional reading and additional resources

Note: No class on Wednesday 24 October 2011 (study break)

Class 8: Wednesday 31 October 2012

Historiography, archival research and process tracing

Note: Literature reviews due.

Key themes
- Historical methods
  - Archival research
- Process tracing

Team presentation #5: Archival research

Required reading
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Optional reading and additional resources

Class 9: Wednesday 7 November 2012
Multi-method research: Bridging qualitative and quantitative methods

Key themes
- Statistical data: Where do the numbers come from?
  - Academic, policy and programming needs of statistical data
  - Challenges of obtaining statistics in areas of armed conflict
  - Definitional debates and implications for numbers
  - Advocacy and creation of ‘facts’ (e.g. child soldiers and trafficking)
  - Macro-comparative research
- Challenges and opportunities in pursuing multi-method research

Team presentation #6: Multi-method research (quantitative and qualitative)

Required reading

Optional reading and additional resources

Class 10: Wednesday 14 November 2012
Modelling, simulations, experiments and participatory techniques
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Note: Student presentations of research proposals.

Key themes
- Key concepts related to modelling, simulations and experiments
  - Distinctions between causality and correlation
  - Control groups
  - Internal and external validity
- Key features/elements of experimentation
  - Utility of experiments and simulations for conflict research
- Popular models in conflict research: Prisoner’s dilemma; chicken; bully; maximizing differences
- Participatory research tools (e.g. mapping)

Team presentation #7: Natural experiments

Required reading

Optional reading and additional resources

Class 11: Wednesday 21 November 2012
Transcribing, analyzing and disseminating findings

Note: Student presentations of research proposals.

Key themes
- Systematic recording of qualitative data
- Transcribing and analyzing oral data
- Coding
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- Citing sources
- Anonymity and confidentiality
- Representation and presentation
- Referencing
- Ethical considerations: Impact of findings on peace and conflict dynamics

**Required reading**


**Optional reading and additional resources**


**Class 12: Wednesday 28 November 2012**

Discourse and content analysis; interpreting visual and symbolic data

**Note:** Student presentations of research proposals

**Key themes**

- Content and discourse analysis
- Interpretive approaches
  - Semiotics (Barthes), ordinary language use analysis (Wittgenstein), discourse analysis (Foucault)

**Required reading**


**Optional reading and additional resources**


Class 13: Wednesday 5 December 2012
Closing the loop? Linking research, policy and practice

Note: Final research proposals due.

Key themes
• The relationship between research and policy
• Understanding power relations amongst researchers, research populations, those commissioning research and the policy community
• Evaluations of impacts of investments in peace and conflict resolution: Understanding objectives and results
  • Opportunities and challenges of action research

Required reading

Optional reading and additional resources

Course Assignments and Evaluation Criteria

Participation in class (10%)
The active participation of all students is essential to a successful seminar. Due to the applied and interactive nature of the course, participation in class activities is mandatory. According to university policy, any student with unsatisfactory participation in the course will fail. If you need to be absent, please advise the professor in writing in advance.

Participation will be assessed on the basis of:
• Regular presence in class
• Demonstrated preparation (required readings done, questions prepared on each reading)
• Contribution to discussion
• Active participation in class activities
• Encouragement of participation of other students
Short Essay (10%)
Deadline: 8:30AM, 26 September 2011

Learning objectives
• To develop effective written communication skills;
• To develop academic writing style;
• To develop the ability to articulate and defend a compelling argument; and
• To appreciate and engage in key theoretical and ethical debates raised by the academic literature on the development and conduct of social science research, particularly in the field of conflict studies.

Instructions
In the first session, the professor will circulate a list of questions for this assignment, based on the topics discussed in the first three classes. Choose one of the questions listed, and prepare a 1,500 word argumentative essay responding to it. If you prefer to write your essay on a different topic, this must be cleared with the professor by email by Monday 19 September.

The essay must articulate and defend a clear argument, and draw upon at least six relevant academic sources.

Break-down of marks
5 points  Effective communication of ideas
• Clear and logical organization of ideas
• Pertinent examples
• Style
• Grammar and spelling
• Referencing according to academic conventions

5 points  Understanding and application of key relevant theories and literature
• Critical analysis of relevant theoretical and conceptual debates and perspectives
• Critical analysis of relevant academic literature

10 points  Analysis and argument
• Articulation of a clear, well-structured argument
• Effective support provided for the main argument (examples, etc.)
• Recognition of potential counterarguments and provision of appropriate rebuttals
• Effective conclusion

Literature review (20%)
Deadline: 8:30AM, 31 October 2012

Learning objectives
• To contribute to deeper understanding of theoretical and conceptual issues related to the chosen research topic;
• To improve written communication skills and the ability to produce an advanced literature review;
• To improve academic writing style;
• To improve capacity to assess relevance and validity of methodological approaches adopted in secondary sources; and
• To assist students in refining their research question/hypotheses.

Instructions
The literature review should reflect in-depth research and analysis. In 2000 words (approximately 7 double-spaced, typed pages), excluding footnotes and bibliography, write a critical literature review on a topic previously approved by the professor. Your literature review must:
• Clearly articulate the topic for which the literature review has been undertaken;
• Explore the definitional, conceptual and theoretical issues related to the topic;
• Identify relevant trends and the empirical, theoretical and methodological gaps in the current literature;
• Engage at least 15 academic sources relevant to your topic. (Grey literature may be included as additional sources, but will not count towards the 15 academic references.)

The literature review should not simply summarize each source consulted, but rather engage analytically with the existing literature and show how the topic you identify on the basis of your literature review would make a contribution to knowledge.

Break-down of marks:
5 points   Effective communication
  • Clear and logical organization of ideas
  • Style
  • Grammar and spelling
  • Referencing according to academic conventions (Harvard citation style recommended)

10 points  Understanding of key concepts, theories, trends and gaps in the literature
  • Critical review of relevant theoretical and conceptual debates and perspectives
  • Critical analysis of strengths and weaknesses of relevant academic literature
  • Critical assessment of methodology used in academic literature
  • Clear articulation of student’s position vis-à-vis the examined literature

5 points   Case for relevance of selected topic
  • Identification of relevant research gaps
  • Explanation of how the topic you identify on the basis of the literature review complements, supplements and/or builds on existing studies

Team presentation (15%)
Deadline: Varies. Teams will be created and topics and presentation dates will be allocated during the first class.

Learning objectives
• To develop oral communication skills;
• To contribute to peer learning;
• To develop the ability to critically analyze the methodological approach and specific research methods applied in a major piece of research relevant to conflict studies; and
• To develop the capacity to lead a discussion.

Instructions
Each team will prepare an oral presentation in English of 20 minutes in length, followed by a 10-minute discussion period. A laptop and projector for powerpoint presentations will be made available for all classes. If additional audio-visual equipment is required, the presentation team must inform the professor at least one week in advance.

Each presentation must analyze the methodological approach and specific research methods applied in a major piece of research relevant to conflict studies. The piece of research the group chooses to analyze must draw heavily upon the research methods/methodological approaches that are the focus of the class in which the team will present, e.g. the team presenting in the class on modelling, simulations and experiments must analyze a piece of research that features models, simulations or experiments. Suggestions for appropriate pieces of research to analyze for this presentation are provided in the notes for each class set out above. Each team must inform the class at least one week in advance of the piece of research they will analyze, so that class members may familiarize themselves with the work in advance of the presentation if they so choose. If a team wishes to focus on a piece of research other than those suggested above, this must be confirmed with the professor at least two weeks in advance.
Each presentation must:

- **Briefly** introduce the piece of research the group has chosen to analyze, including:
  - The main research question
  - The methodological approach and research methods applied by the researcher
  - The structure of the researcher’s argument
  - The main conclusions reached

- Analyze the methodological approach and main research methods deployed by the author(s) of the work under examination by answering the following questions:
  - What were the main research methods used in this work?
  - What were the main strengths and weaknesses of the researcher’s methodological approach and the particular research methods chosen for this study?
  - Are the researcher’s findings valid?
  - How could this study have been improved?

- Draw on secondary literature to enrich the team’s analysis (as appropriate);
- Follow a logical structure and advance a clear argument, based on the team’s responses to the above questions;
- Be followed by a ten-minute discussion period, led by the presenting team on the basis of carefully-crafted discussion questions, that engages the class in further critical reflection on the utility of the research methods under discussion; and
- Actively involve each team member in presenting the group’s analysis and/or facilitating the subsequent class discussion.

All team members will receive the same grade.

**Break-down of marks**

10 points **Effective communication of ideas**
- Logical organization of ideas/structure
- Clear explanation of the research under discussion and the methods used in it
- Appropriate use of visual or oral learning aids
- Ability to engage with the class

15 points **Analysis and argument**
- Adequate definition of relevant concepts and terms
- Concise, accurate introduction of research question, methodological approach/research methods applied, structure of the researcher’s argument, and main conclusion
- Detailed, convincing analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology/methods applied, the validity of the findings, and options for improving the research design
- Effective use of secondary literature to enrich the analysis
- Clear argument advanced on the basis of the team’s analysis

5 points **Effective facilitation of class discussion**
- Development and utilization of a stimulating set of discussion questions that encourage class members to reflect critically on the methodological challenges raised by presentation
- Effectively encourages the participation of different members of the class

**Presentation on research proposal (5%)**
The first portion of the 10th, 11th and 12th classes (14th, 21st and 28th November) will be devoted to presentations on students’ research proposals. Students are encouraged to apply the feedback they receive on their presentations to improve their final research proposals.

**Learning objectives**
- To develop oral communication skills;
- To contribute to peer learning;
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- To develop the ability to respond constructively to peers' academic work;
- To assist the student in developing a clear, articulate research question and methodology; and
- To develop the ability to present a sophisticated research project succinctly and convincingly.

Instructions
Prepare a 5-minute oral presentation (maximum) and copies of a one-page hand-out in English on your research proposal. A laptop and projector for powerpoint presentations will be available for all classes. If you wish to use powerpoint, you must send your presentation to the professor by email by 8:00AM on the day of your presentation to be saved on the laptop that will be used during the class.

This presentation must include:
- A clear articulation of the research question(s)/hypotheses;
- A definition of the key terms/concepts;
- A rationale for the importance and relevance of the proposed research topic; and
- An explanation of the proposed research methodology and rationale for the methods chosen.

Each presentation will be followed by a brief discussion of 5 minutes, during which time students are encouraged to offer constructive feedback on the proposal presented.

Break-down of marks
5 points Effective communication of ideas
  - Logical organization of ideas/structure
  - Clear explanations
  - Appropriate use of visual or oral learning aids
  - Ability to engage with the class

10 points Proposed methodology
  - Clear research question/hypothesis
  - Adequate definition of relevant concepts and terms
  - Clear rationale for research topic
  - Appropriate methodological approach

Research proposal (40%)

Deadline: 1:30 PM, 5 December 2011 (Please note late policy below.)

Learning objectives:
- To develop the capacity to plan a compelling research project, and make a convincing case for its relevance and feasibility;
- To apply conceptual and theoretical frameworks to the chosen research topic;
- To develop the ability to choose and apply appropriate methodological approaches to answer a research question;
- To develop the ability to identify and develop appropriate research methods to investigate the chosen topic; and
- To critically engage with academic literature relevant to the chosen research topic.

Instructions:
The research proposal, which replaces a final exam, is a comprehensive written assignment consisting of a maximum of 3,500 words (approximately 15 pages, plus bibliography). You must choose a topic, with the professor’s prior agreement, that is related to conflict studies. Please confirm your topic with the professor by email by 19 October 2012.

The research proposal must:
- Clearly articulate a research question/hypothesis;
Provide a rationale and the importance and relevance of the proposed research topic, and demonstrate the relevance of this research question/hypothesis vis-à-vis existing literature on this topic;

• Define all key terms and concepts;
• Situate the study within an appropriate theoretical framework;
• Describe and justify a proposed methodology for the study;
• Discuss the specific research methods you will draw upon to complete your study, and explain the practical steps that you will take to implement the chosen methods;
• Make effective use of the relevant literature on methodologies and specific research methods;
• Address the ethical issues entailed by the study and how you intend to respond to these;
• Identify potential challenges you will face as a researcher on this project, and how you will address these; and,
• Delimit the scope of your study (i.e. indicate clearly the limits of your project and what you will not attempt to do).

Break-down of marks:

10 points Effective communication and argumentation
• Clear and logical organization of ideas
• Pertinent examples
• Style
• Grammar and spelling
• Referencing according to academic conventions

10 points Understanding of key concepts, theories and studies
• Definition of relevant terms
• Identification and explanation of an appropriate conceptual/theoretical framework for the proposed project
• Clear and thorough discussion of the relationship of the proposed study to existing literature

10 points Methodological approach
• Formulation of a feasible and compelling research question
• Identification of appropriate research methods and the steps required to apply these methods
• Understanding of methodological and ethical challenges and how to address these

10 points Relevance and feasibility of proposed study
• Expected contribution to knowledge
• Awareness of practical risks and limitations
• Articulation of viable strategies to manage challenges, risks and limits of the proposed study

General instructions and policies for written assignments

Late policy
Written work (short essays and research proposal) is due at the start of class on the specified due dates. Late papers will be subject to a 10% penalty per day, starting with the due date, except in exceptional cases, with the professor’s prior agreement. Extensions will not be granted on the day an assignment is due, except in case of medical or family emergency, accompanied by appropriate documentation.

Language
As per university policy, written assignments may be submitted in French or English. Lectures and class activities will be conducted in English, given that this is the language of instruction for the course.

Format and style
Students are required to type their text in 12-point font with standard margins. Please double space the text. Use single spacing for block quotations, footnotes, appendices and bibliographies.
References and citations must follow a standard academic format. Please consult style manuals and/or the University of Ottawa’s Writing and Style Guide for general advice: http://www.sciencessociales.uottawa.ca/guide-en.asp.

Academic fraud

Any person found guilty of academic fraud will be subject to severe sanctions. Some examples of academic fraud include:

- plagiarism or cheating of any kind;
- submitting work of which the student is not the author, in whole or in part (except for duly cited quotations or references);
- presenting research data that has been falsified or concocted in any way; and
- submitting, without written prior approval from the professors concerned, the same work for more than one course.

If you require further information, please consult the Saint Paul University and University of Ottawa websites, particularly the following links:
http://www.ustpaul.ca/HumanSciences/academicRegulations_graduate_e.asp#Fraud
http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/info regist/fraud_e.html
http://www.uottawa.ca/plagiarism.pdf

Note: This syllabus draws on research methods courses taught at Saint Paul University by Professors Megan Bradley, Christina Clark-Kazak, and by instructors at other universities and institutes. Copies of syllabi from other research methods courses are on file with the professor for consultation by students looking for additional suggestions on helpful literature.