

Chesapeake Project Course Revision Plans.

Conflict Management, COMM 426, Spring 2014.

There are many important synergies between sustainability and conflict resolution. In order to create a safe and sustainable future, we must, as a society, learn how to manage and resolve conflicts with one another. Our most pressing challenges as a globe require that we show skillfulness in engaging with each other, recognizing how we can creatively approach our interdependent goals to create new opportunities for a better future.

There are both substantive and procedural ways that this course is infused with the theme of sustainability. Most reading materials and assignments will be handled entirely through electronic means, helping us to limit our use (or overuse) of paper. I have also added curriculum that focuses us on environmental conflicts. The Chesapeake Bay case study project, and a course session about systems thinking are two examples of this effort.

Learning Objectives for sustainability:

1. Understand the dynamics of conflict and its resolution:

The definition of conflict that I often use states that conflict is struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resource, and interference from others in achieving their goals.

This definition connects deeply to a core theme of sustainability. The interdependence and interconnectness that ties us will emerge as an important concept in the course. I will strive to connect this theme of interconnectedness to the notion of sustainability in course exercises and course discussions. It will also be assessed via exam questions on the midterm and final exam.

2. Improve your skills in self reflection and self awareness in the face of conflict

Self awareness is an essential feature of sustainability. I will be encouraging self awareness within group discussions and written self reflection assignments.

3. Understand the processes of negotiation, mediation, facilitation, and consensus building

Capacity in one or more of these processes is critical for those who seek to change minds and serve as change agents. Skills and processes will be taught through case studies and simulation modules. As these skills require "learning through action", the assessment will occur by in class participation.

4. Understand how to analyze conflict from a systems view

Sustainability, much like a good conflict analysis, relies on recognizing a situation with a systems view. Systems thinking will be the focus a single course session, and will emerge throughout the course. This mindset will prove useful in elevating the students' understanding of sustainability and conflict.

5. Conduct a conflict analysis

Conflict analysis is a central focus of the course. The students will work in groups for a major course assignment to conduct a conflict analysis project. This conflict analysis depends on considering the systemic view of a conflict situation and will deepen students' capacity of systems thinking.