**MPC 6620 Conflict Resolution and Mediation**

Instructor: Office Phone:

Office: Department Office:

Email: Office hours:

**Course Description**

Communication is at the center of any negotiation or mediation process. It is in and through communication that resolution becomes possible. This class will explore the key interpersonal skills that are central to managing the processes of conflict resolution and mediation competently.

**Course Format:** includes 24 hours of classroom instruction, approximately 24 hours of online instruction and approximately 60-70 hour of reading and projects outside of class.

**Textbooks:**

Advanced Negotiation and Mediation concepts, skills and exercises, by J. Holbrook & B. Cook, St. Paul, MN: West Academic Publishing, 2013.

Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as you Negotiate, by R. Fisher & D. Shapiro. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

Difficult Conversations: How to discuss what matters most, by D. Stone, B. Patton & S. Heen. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.

**Learning Objectives**

LO#1 Students will identify and analyze their conflict communicative patterns.

LO#2 Students will identify and analyze their conflict resolution communicative skills

LO#3 Students will evaluate and develop their conflict resolution communicative skills.

LO#4 Students will create a conflict resolution plan.

LO#5 Students will understand and analyze various perspectives in conflict resolution.

**Assignments:**

Additional details will be provided through canvas and in class as assignments approach.

**Conflict Profile**: Metaphor, history, approach, style, conflict analysis (LO #1,2) 20 points

Understanding your conflict history, approach, style, and level of communication competence is crucial in developing new approaches and skills for conflict management. How you view and "do" conflict creates a lens which is used to make sense of conflict situations. Your lens creates the context, limitations, and possibilities each conflict has.

This assignment will be an opportunity for you to explore and articulate your current conflict profile and assess it for strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. This profile will also be the starting point for determining your conflict management plan and final project.

Element 1 - Conflict Metaphor: provide a metaphor for conflict. A useful metaphor is one that captures the overall emotional experience and reflects truths about the way your do conflict. Analyze your metaphor in depth. In what ways does it resonate? Where does it fall short? Where is it most consistent? If framed differently how would it change, and is there room for other possibilities? Is there a metaphor that captures the possibilities of how you hope conflict could be?

Element 2 - Conflict History/Turning Points: Our approach and styles of managing conflict begin with what we have been taught about conflict. Those lessons can come from primary caregivers, in classrooms, on the playground, in boardrooms, courtrooms, and are rarely formal. What has life taught you about how conflict should be understood? How has that perspective changed over time? What are the important turning points or historical markers of your current view of conflict?

Element 3 - Communication Patterns: Analyze a recent conflict with someone in which you are in an ongoing interdependent relationship. What are the patterns that you can identify? How is the conflict initiated? What are the various communicative "moves" that are made? Are the outcomes predictable?

Element 4 - Conflict Approach and Style: Synthesize from the previous elements a profile of your current conflict approach and style. Provide examples. Based on this examination what is the most important areas for you to develop your conflict management skills? Use this as a starting point for building a specific conflict resolution plan.

**Communication Skills Profile:** What is it like, winning moves, roles, emotional intelligence (LO #2,3) 20 points

Mediation, conflict management, negotiation, conflict resolution practices in all forms are accomplished in and through communication. Communication can also be the cause, content, process, and product of a conflict. Accurately assessing your own communicative skills is crucial in developing the ability to manage conflict. In this portion of your project will be comprised of 3 components.

Component 1: Communicative Impression Exercise -- Choose 3 people with whom you have some history of communication. I recommend choosing them from a variety of relationship types such as family, work, significant other, friends, or peers. Request a conversation and use the following questions to guide it.

* Please describe what it is like to communicate with me.
* What are my greatest strengths as a communicator?
* What areas of my communication have room for improvement?
* What would you request of me as a communicator in the future?

Your responsibility in this exercise will be to listen ONLY. You may wish to ask permission to take notes. Please provide the time and context necessary to complete the conversation in a comfortable way. After asking each question do not provide explanations, apologies, or a response of any kind other than to sincerely thank the participant for their willingness to be open and provide you with valuable feedback.

Component 2: Report and reflect on the previous exercise. What was that like for you? What did you learn? What was surprising if anything about what you learned? Did you notice any themes or patterns in the various responses? How did that conversation reinforce or change your view of your communication?

Component 3: Using the exercise you have completed for assistance analyze your communication. Identify your strengths (include your vitame.org strengths profile) as a communicator and how you can utilize these within a conflict situation. What areas do you have that are in need of additional emphasis and development?

Component 4: Create a plan for further developing at least one skill. You will use this plan to complete the skills building assignment. Be specific about how, where, and when you will practice.

**Conflict Resolution Plan:** (LO #4) 35 points

Synthesize the work you have done in the previous portions of this project to create a conflict resolution plan or to report on a conflict that you engaged in. How did you, or will you, apply the lessons learned from the texts and previous elements of this project?

Where do you go from here?

The final project will be assessed based on your integration of course content and experiences, the depth and detail of your reflection/analysis, and clarity of writing. Good questions are often more valuable than answers.

**Book discussion questions**: (LO #5) 15 points

As a group discuss and create a brief review of the text and from that organize a set of questions to guide the book discussion in class. Some areas for consideration: what is your overall assessment and review of the text? What are its strengths? Where does it fall short? How does it relate to your experiences with conflict? How can it be applied to your current work in this class? What specific elements of the text are most interesting for further discussion?

**Communication Skills Development Paper**: student choice (LO #2,3) 10 points

Report on the outcome of the plan you created form the communicative skills assignment. How did you put your plan into practice? What did you learn from those experiences? What was most difficult? In what ways did you see improvement and what plans do you have for continuing to develop?

**Class Schedule**

Week 1 Process versus product thinking, conflict metaphors. Students learn to analyze their metaphors and approach to conflict.

Week2 Distributive v. integrative approaches to conflict and the paradigm shift needed to create an integrative approach.

Week 3 Book Discussion: Difficult Conversations

Week 4 Conflict as possibility for empowerment and transformation. Communication tools needed to move from a distributive to an integrative approach.

Week 5 Book Discussion: Beyond Reason

Week 6 Underlying principles of conflict resolution and mediation in practice.

Week 7 Book Discussion: Advanced Negotiation and Mediation Concepts

Week8 Final Project presentations