1. Course Description:

This course will provide an overview of conflict management methods congruent with the demands of multiple domains and levels of social work practice. Students in all concentrations must address conflicts arising between people whose lives are interdependent whether they be board members, neighbors, or spouses. The community activist working to develop interorganizational collaboratives and the social work clinician helping individuals and families resolve disputes must both learn about the dynamics of face-to-face conflicts and the range of techniques and strategies available to help prevent, de-escalate, and resolve such differences. This course will offer practical suggestions for both assessment and intervention drawing from micro and macro theory and practice.

2. Course Content:

This course will address the development and resolution of conflict that occurs within organizations, communities, and families. Students will be introduced to sociological, psychological, and communications approaches to conceptualizing conflict processes. They will examine the interplay of needs, values, skills, and resources in conflict interaction. The role of power as a critical determiner of conflict processes and outcomes will be theoretically explored, and strategies for dealing with power imbalances will be reviewed. The influence of demographic factors, such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, and culture as shapers of conflict will also be investigated. Intervention techniques drawn from interpersonal, organizational, and community conflict management situations will be presented and evaluated. The professional roles of consultant advocate, therapist, and mediator will be contrasted. How professional role performance relates to one’s personal conflict experience and history will also be considered.
3. Course Objectives:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able:

1. Understand generic conflict processes that operate in small and large systems from a variety of theoretical perspectives.
2. Assess which needs, values, intentions, skills, and resources are salient shapers of cooperation and conflict in specific circumstances and settings.
3. Recognize the differences in conflict dynamics that may occur between intimates and strangers within differing cultural contexts and in terms of social structural, situational, and life stage demand characteristics.
4. Gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors and processes involved in positive interaction and intimacy, as well as those involved in oppressive relationships.
5. Understand the situationally relevant factors involved in the prevention of conflict, the de-escalation of conflict, and the resolution of conflict.
6. Develop, expand, and refine skills necessary so that interpersonal conflicts serve as opportunities for the establishment of social justice between disputants rather than merely as opportunities for the re-establishment of social order.
7. Discuss typical ethical concerns related to building conflict management effectiveness.

4. Course Design:

This course is designed to facilitate the integration of theory and practice and will involve lectures, discussions, and experiential exercises. Although, this course will frequently involve presentation of information by the course instructor or guest lecturers, the quality of the discussion will be dependent upon the case examples, observations, and questions that students bring to class in response to the assigned topic. Therefore, student preparation and willingness to participate will be essential, since skill development depends on practice.

5. Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes:

- **Multiculturalism and Diversity:** Students will gain knowledge necessary to assess the ways in which the dynamics of conflicts differ across culture, race, gender, class, ethnicity, and other forms of social stratification. In addition, they will learn strategies for intervention that respect these differences and are particularly suitable for fostering across group dialogue and cooperative action.

- **Social Justice and Social Change:** Conflict resolution can serve not only as a means to re-establish social order but also as an opportunity to establish social justice. In this class, students will be challenged to think about how different forms of conflict intervention may support or inhibit change efforts directed at increasing social justice. They will also learn how to assess whether methods aimed at establishing more just relationships actually are likely to have this intended effect.
• **Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation:** Too often conflict intervention efforts are begun when conflict has already escalated and is perceived as intractable or severe. This course is designed to help students identify the precursors of violent behavior and learn interventions that prevent conflict escalation, as well as those likely to de-escalate conflicts once they have been expressed in violent form.

• **Behavioral and Social Science Research:** Programs in human services are designed under particular social, economic, and political circumstances and often become obsolete when circumstances change. Students will be introduced to selected social science models and theories that can be used as tools to design and evaluate the relevancy and “fit” of given conflict interventions and programs to the conflicts they purport to resolve.

6. **Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values:**

The many complex ethical issues encountered by social workers attempting to manage and resolve conflict will be considered. These will include the question of third-party neutrality, the role of conflict escalation in the service of social justice, how to deal with power imbalances, etc. Ethical standards of social work practice (e.g. NASW, ABSW) will be analyzed and used to assess commonly confronted issues.

**Required Texts:**


Other readings will be on reserve in the library, available online or distributed in class. Assigned readings for each week are noted in the syllabus. Readings should be completed by the date assigned.
ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Due January 22, 2002: A two to four page paper describing your personal style of dealing with conflict. Is it the same or different in your personal and professional lives, explain. The paper should include an analysis of your personal style in the context of a recent conflict you were involved in, and your thoughts on your strengths and weakness in dealing with the conflict. What are your thoughts on what makes someone skilled at resolving conflict? How does culture and gender affect this? There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. It is your thoughts on these questions that are important. This assignment will not be graded.

2. Due February 12, 2002: This assignment will be based on role play fact patterns for you and the other side for the in-class negotiation held on February 19, 2002. I will distribute the roles in class on February 5th. The assignment is a two to four page paper describing your preparation for the negotiation using the main points of Getting to Yes. Your analysis should include: 1) both your and the other sides interests, and the interests of any other relevant person(s) and why you identified them as such and the reason behind the interests 2) what you have identified as options for agreement and possible ways to maximize joint gains; 3) alternatives to agreement for you and the other side; 4) possible external standards to use; 5) identify elements that should be included in agreement from the meeting; and 6) how the other side might explain the outcome of a negotiation to someone important to them. This paper will count for 25% of your grade.

3. Due February 19, 2002: A four to five page paper reviewing your negotiation effort. What agreements did you reach? How did this match/differ from what you expected? Start with the successful part. Answer the following questions: What worked? What might you want to repeat the next time you negotiate? What would you do differently? How did your preparation help? What preparation wasted time? What additional preparation might have helped? How did you separate the substantive from the relationship issues. This paper will count for 30% of your grade.

4. Due March 5, 2002: A two to three page paper analyzing a recent difficult conversation you engaged in from the three levels described in the book, (what happened, feeling and identity), from both your and the other’s perspective. Did this analysis assist you in thinking about how to continue the conversation productively? Describe how or why not. This paper will count for 15% of your grade.

5. Due April 9, 2002: A five to seven page paper analyzing the mediator in both the divorce or multi-party mediation simulations. The papers should include a discussion of what transpired during each of the stages of the mediations and the skills and strategies used to keep the participants moving toward agreement or a decision to end the mediation. You should relate the strategies you used to specific readings, and assess whether they worked or not. Also, include what you would do the same and differently in your next mediation. This paper will count for 30% of your grade.

Assignments can not be revised or re-submitted after they are turned in.
LECTURES AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:

1. January 8, 2002

Overview of Course
Introductions
What is conflict?
A multi-level approach to thinking about conflict
Communication as the “heart” of conflict resolution

2. January 15

Personal Conflict Styles
Defining the conflict: How to deal with values in conflict
Introduction to models for resolving conflict


3. January 22

Principled Negotiation Theory


Assignment 1 due in class

4. January 29

Communication Techniques Helpful for Negotiations
Identifying Issues
Selecting an Order for Discussion
Dealing with Emotional Issues
Impasse

Reading: Mayer Chapter 6 “Communication”, Chapter 7 “Negotiation and Advocacy” & Chapter 8- “The Road to Resolution- Overcoming Impasse”

5. February 5

How to prepare to Negotiate – What do you need to know?
Beginning to Negotiate
Is the issue right for negotiation?
Power Imbalances & Dirty Tricks
Who should be included in the negotiation?

**Reading:** Fisher & Ury *Getting to Yes*, chapters 3-end  (“Yes, But… -what if they are more powerful, what if they won’t play, what if they use dirty tricks” & In Conclusion, Answers to 10 Questions people ask”)

6. February 12

Negotiation Role Play

**Assignment 2 – negotiation preparation sheet due**

7. February 19

What makes a conversation difficult?
How to engage in a difficult conversation

**Reading:** *Difficult Conversations* pgs 1-128

**Assignment 3—negotiation analysis due**

February 26 – no class spring break

8. March 5

Review of Negotiation Role Play & Critiques
What is a learning conversation & why does it help
How to begin the learning conversation
Conversation skills

**Reading:** *Difficult Conversations* pgs 129-end

**Assignment 4 due**

9. March 12

Guest Lecturer

10. March 19
Introduction to Mediation
What is mediation and how it differs from negotiation

Role of Mediator – neutrality, directs process, not outcome, balancing power, writing agreements, how to handle future disputes
Stages of Mediation

Mediation Demonstration

Reading: Mayer, chapter 9 – “Mediation”

11. March 26, 2002

Mediation in the context of Family Issues (parent child, divorce, adult guardianship, juvenile court).
Step by Step explanation of Divorce Mediation;
Role Play on parenting statement and parenting time schedule.

Reading: will be on file in library by Zena Zumeta on Divorce Mediation;

12. April 2

Multi-party mediation
Lecture & Role play

Guest lecture Susan Hartman, JD

Reading: to be assigned

13. April 9

Other Approaches to Conflict Resolution
Social Justice and Alternative Dispute Resolution
Mediation

Designing conflict resolution systems
Setting up a mediation system – court, school related, dispute resolution centers,
The limits of mediation and other alternatives

Reading: Mayer, Chapters 10 & 11 (Other Approaches to the Resolution of Conflict and Conclusion); Mark Chesler 1991 article “Alternative Dispute Resolution and Social Justice” on reserve in library, mediator standards, mediator professional groups, training, standards. how to get started mediating
Final Assignment Due

14. April 16: Careers in Alternative Resolution; Integration into Social Work Practice