CRITICAL ISSUES IN COMMUNICATION

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Students examine transformations in the communication processes that influence conflict management and resolution as manifested in diverse contexts. Issues will be explored from the perspectives of gender, culture and ethnicity.

OBJECTIVES
To provide students with: 1) an understanding of how changes in the way conflict is viewed has been reflected primarily in communication studies; 2) to enable a critical evaluation of communication competency in assessing, managing, defusing and resolving conflict.

ASSIGNMENTS BY WEEK
Note: Articles from the packet will be identified with the symbol (P).

Class 1: Introduction and Course Overview; Requirements. Traditional Approaches to Communication Conflict Management; Conflict Types; General Approaches to, and Definitions of, Conflict Handling Behaviors.

Class 2: The Pervasiveness of Conflict (Tannen, Ch. 1); Transforming the Metaphoric Lens of Conflict: From “Combat: to “Opportunity” (Borisoff & Victor, Ch. 1). Sample cases.

Class 3: The Grammar of Conflict Communication: Verbal and Non-verbal Strategies (Borisoff & Victor, Chs. 2, 3) Smith, Cody, Lovette & Canary (P); Putnam & Poole (P). First case due.

Class 4: Dimensions of justice and trust in conflict communication. Deutsch (P); Lewiski & Wiethoff (P). Sample cases.

Class 5: Dimensions of the argument culture in society: maintaining bi-polar thinking. (Tannen, Chs. 2, 3, 4, 5; Jamieson handouts). Sample cases.

Class 6 & 7: Conflict communication: The lenses of gender in professional contexts. (Borisoff & Victor, Ch. 4); (Tannen, Ch. 6) (Sagrestano & Heavey (P)); (Christensen (P)); (Putnam & Kolb (P)); (Koerner & Fitzpatrick (P)). Sample cases.

Class 8 & 9: Conflict communication: The lenses of gender in professional contexts. (Borisoff & Victor, Ch. 5); (Papa & Papa (P); (Euwema & van de Vlier (P)); (Watson (P)); (Kusztal (P)); (Fritz (P)); (Borisoff 1994 (P)). Second case due (Class 8). Sample cases.

Class 10 & 11: Conflict communication: The lenses of culture. (Borisoff & Victor, Ch. 5); (Tannen, Ch.7); (Cai & Fink (P)); (Fisher); (Ting-Toome (P)); (Tjosvold et al (P)); (Borisoff 1996 (P)). Third case due (Class 10). Sample cases.

Class 12: Conflict communication: The lens of ethnicity Beinstien Miller (P)); (Orbe & Harris (P)). Sample cases. Final Paper Due.

Class 13: Conflict communication: Technologically-enhanced aggression (Tannen, Ch. 8; Borisoff & Victor, Ch. 6). Sample cases. Final Paper Due.
Classes 14&15: Conflict communication: The hope of dialogue—changing the logos altering the lens.
(Tannen, Ch. 9); (Roach (P)); (Eisler (P); (Fisher); (Haste—handout).

ASSIGNMENTS:
Students are responsible for 4 assignments. Three case studies are due at designated intervals throughout the semester. Cases are intended to integrate and apply discrete/selected theoretical concepts from the reading. Each case should be approximately 5 pages double-spaced. (Guidelines are provided in the text). The professor will provide additional cases).

In addition, students will select a topic for a research paper (approximately 15-20 pages in length). Sample topics: 1) Several of the readings suggest ‘appropriate’/‘effective’ verbal and nonverbal communication for managing conflict productively. To what extent do the prescriptions in the research literature conform to, or deviate from, selected mainstream venues?, 2) Using selected class readings as a point of departure, what are some of the ethical considerations and challenges for teaching communication competency in conflict management in organizations that are increasingly multinational; global?, 3) Recent pan-national studies suggest the pervasiveness of sex-role and sex-trait stereotypes. To what extent do assumptions about presumed norms privilege and/or marginalize modes of communication in the conflict management process? Students are required to submit an abstract and outline of their intended topic and to discuss their proposed topic with the professor by week 6 of the course.

ASSESSMENT OF REQUIREMENTS:
1. Participation:  5%
2. Case studies: Case 1= 10pts; Cases 2&3; 15pts. each
3. Paper:  55%

READINGS:
Books: (Available at NYU Bookstore)

Coursepack:


ADDITIONAL SAMPLE TOPICS FOR PAPERS:

Select a controversial topic that is being scrutinized publicly. Using published articles (which you will need to attach to your paper), apply the appropriate reading to assess:
   a) background on the topic; b) points of conflict; c) specific language use/linguistic tactics that either maintains difference or that is trying to move the issue toward resolution; d) your own estimation of the potential resolution to the conflict. Below are some possible topics (feel free to select another topic):

a). The lens of personal freedom and one’s body: Revisiting Roe v. Wade and a “woman’s right to choose.”
b). The lens of national “safety”: The U.S.’s decision to enter War with Iraq.
c). The lens of opportunity: Some critics are claiming that Affirmative Action is “dead.” What has led to that assessment?
d). The lens of access: A new drug bill for Senior Citizens has resulted in a major critique of this bill by members of the AARP.
e). The lens/language of relationships: Who is allowed to be “married”—the state/future of gay and lesbian marriages.
f). The lens of “security”: What aspects of basic tenets were supported and/or subverted in the writing and passage of the Patriot Act?
g). The lens of freedom: How has “profiling” been justified? At what cost?

2. Literacy works can provide a site for intra- and inter-personal conflict. Using selected appropriate class readings as a point of departure, assess one of the following works (you may use other texts, as well):
   a). Ralph Ellison’s The Invisible Man (The lens of race)
b). Mikhails Bulgakov’s The Master and Margarita (the lens of political oppression)
c). Honore de Balzac’s Lost Illusions (the lens of social class)
d). Alejandro Cason’s The Boat without a Fisherman (La barca sin pescador) (the lens of individual choice)
e). Mary Shelly’s Frankenstein (the lens of man/woman vs. nature)
f). Wolfgang Goethe’s Faust (the lens of power vs. care)
g). William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet (the lens of love vs. family obligation)

Additional topics are suggested in the syllabus. Be sure to provide an outline/abstract by the 5th or 6th week of the semester