

CRES 4810: Systems and Complexity Approaches to Conflict Analysis

Time: 2:00-4:50 pm WEDS	Location: Cherrington Hall 218	Dates: Mar 26, 2014 - Apr 23, 2014
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Introduction: The “Story” behind this class.

This is the first time (to my knowledge) that this class has been taught at DU (at least in the CRES program), and it is the first time I have taught a class with this title, although I have been thinking in this area for a number of years and have incorporated “systems analysis” and “systems thinking” into many of my other courses—the DU Intractable Conflict course (which about ½ of you have taken) being one of them. I have also just recently begun to do some writing on this topic.

When Karen Feste asked me to teach this course a couple of months ago, my first thought was “YIKES! I’m not ready to do that yet.” But I quickly decided that this class could be a challenge to “get my act together” a bit faster than I might otherwise do—and I always enjoy teaching at DU because the students are a lot of fun. So I said “yes.”

I also quickly emailed my long-time good friend Chip Hauss, currently the “Government Liaison” at the Alliance for Peacebuilding in Washington DC. Chip, I knew, was writing a book on systems analysis and peacebuilding. So I asked him if there was any chance the book might be ready—even in draft form—by the beginning of this class.

He might dispute this, but my interpretation of Chip’s first answer was “YIKES!” But he, too, quickly decided that this was a wonderful opportunity to get some early feedback from people who are the intended audience of this book. As he pointed out to me in a subsequent conversation, “you (meaning me, Heidi) are not the intended audience of this book. They (mean you, the students) are.” So he enthusiastically embraced the idea of sharing this book with you in draft form, in the hopes that you will give him your candid feedback about what is useful, clear, and interesting, and what is unconvincing or otherwise needs work.

As you will read, one of Chip’s main themes is that we can all make a difference in solving the most pressing problems of our time (which, by the way, are all very complex, and need “systems thinking” to address). We are all very small parts of “the system,” but every part is connected – at least indirectly – to every other part. So as both I and Chip explain, the actions (and inactions) of every part of a system (person and organization) matters.

You have much more influence than that, in this case, because I think Chip’s book is going to be a best-seller—at least in conflict resolution field. At least it should be—

it NEEDS to be (along with Guy's and my book/work ☺) because it is very insightful, extremely important, engaging, and well written. But YOU have the chance to make it even better. And if you do, you could play a role in changing the way in which CRES is thought about and done – potentially worldwide! So keep that potential – and responsibility-- in mind as you read Chip's book!

The material I (Heidi) present is in much the same state, although I have not yet written it down in book form—and may not ever, since that is not the way I and my ever-present professional and personal partner Guy Burgess tend to work. For many years we have worked on the Internet, not on paper. (Our primary project for the last 15+ years has been BeyondIntractability.org—which I hope you will learn about in this class if you don't already know about it. It was largely written for you.) So what form our current “systems analysis” thinking is going to take, I don't yet know. But I do have a lot of developing ideas to present in this class to discuss alongside Chip's.

As you will learn in Chapter 1-5 of Chip's book, this way of thinking about conflict and social problems more broadly is very new. We both have been doing this kind of work for a long time (some of it together, some not), but we haven't conceptualized it as we are doing now, nor have we published it yet. So what you will be reading and discussing in class is very much a work-in-progress, as your efforts to explore these ideas will also be. Everyone (including you, Chip, and I) will be experimenting and learning “on the edge” in this class.

A particular treat we will have as we do this is Chip's extensive participation in the class. He is going to run an exercise much of the first class (virtually—we'll teleconference him in) and I hope he'll do an introductory “book talk” too. He plans, I think, to participate in many of (perhaps all of) our future classes as well. So you'll get two instructors, not just one, and will be able to talk with the author of your primary text every step of the way. I hope you think that's exciting. I do!

The Class's “Two Tracks”:

The way I envision this class, it will have two simultaneous “tracks.” One track is conceptual, the other is practical. Chip's book largely represents the conceptual track, although I hear the second and third parts of the book (which I have not yet seen) will be highly practical. If they are done in time, we may get to read some of these chapters. But I envision Chip's book primarily as giving us a new “set of lenses” or a “new paradigm” as he describes it, into doing conflict analysis. I will supplement Chip's paradigm with readings from other systems theorists particularly Kenneth Boulding, Peter Coleman, Robert Ricigliano, Wendell Jones—and ideas that Guy and I are developing that we haven't written down yet.

Then the practical track is teaching you how what to do about all this. I am totally “sold,” as ½ of you know, in a technique I call “graphical conflict mapping,” which I first learned from Peter Coleman, but which Guy and I are trying to take to a whole

new (and we think better) level. We will review Peter's approach to conflict mapping (particularly for those of you who weren't with me last fall), but will then add to it with ideas from Rob Ricigliano and Guy and me (maybe Chip will join in here too!) While ½ of you have "done this before," we will go into considerably more detail about mapping strategies, and will work to develop more sophisticated and useful maps than we had time to do last quarter.

So, with that long introduction, here's the "standard" initial syllabus:

Overarching Goals

1. To help students understand where and why systems and complexity approaches for conflict analysis are needed.
2. To help students understand what those terms mean, how they are interpreted and applied differently by different people in our field, and how they are conceptually and practically different from "conflict-analysis-as-usual."
3. To give students the opportunity to analyze a wicked problem or intractable conflict using systems and complexity approaches, particularly graphical conflict mapping.

Readings

All readings will be provided on Blackboard. They consist of

- Draft Chapters of Charles Hauss's new and as-yet-unnamed book
 - Note: Chip is in the process of writing this as the class is meeting, so we really do mean "draft." He writes very well, so this is still very readable, engaging, and valuable material. There are a few typos here and there though, so please forgive! (I asked to use it before Chip even had time to proof it.)
 - The book also does not yet have a title. If you suggest one that he ends up using, you can earn yourself a place in the acknowledgements!
- Several journal articles
- Chapters from one of the leading texts on systemic conflict resolution, Robert Ricigliano's *Making Peace Last*.

Assignments

There are two type types of assignments, split between the two "tracks." First there are reading reflections, through which I hope you will explore and we will discuss the many conceptual ideas presented in the course. The term project, on the other hand, is the practical application of these ideas in the form of complex systems conflict mapping.

- **Reading Reflections:** By 5 pm Tuesday evening before class on weeks 2, 3, and 4, I would like everyone to prepare a 1-2 page (250-500 words) set of reading reflections and discussion questions illustrating
 - your reactions to the readings including comments about what is useful or confusing—particularly about Chip’s book, but also to the extent you want to, on the other readings as well.
 - Aspects of these readings which you think would be interesting to discuss as a group (aim for at least 2 of these per week)
 - Ways in which you see these ideas applying to other conflict theories and practical approaches and
 - how these ideas might play out in the “real world” – either in the context of the conflicts you are studying for your term project, or in other conflict contexts.
 - Submit your reflections to the discussion board, so that everyone can see what everyone else is thinking. You will not be able to see others’ posts, however, before you post your own, so you don’t have to struggle to come up with “unique” ideas.
 - Though you are not required to read your classmates posts, a small amount of “extra credit” will be offer to those who do and who post thoughtful responses online to their peers.

- **Conflict Maps and Analysis:** In addition to the reading reflections, everyone in the class will choose one “wicked problem” or intractable conflict to focus on and will do a complex systems analysis of this problem using graphical conflict mapping techniques. We will also analyze those maps to find out what they tell us about “ripe places” in conceptual terms, space, and time for conflict transformation.
 - This may sound “scary,” but you will read about what this means, we will do this together in class, and you will learn (as ½ of you already have last semester, I hope) how very powerful this technique is for investigating, understanding and ultimately engaging constructively in difficult, intractable, and complex conflicts.
 - For those of you who are continuing on with me from last semester, you have two options. You can continue to work on your same conflict and refine your earlier maps based on the new material we will be engaging this quarter, or you can do a new conflict. We will be mapping different elements this time than we did last, so while it will work fine to “start here,” it will also work to add new elements to your earlier maps.
 - Unlike last quarter, since the focus of this class is on conflict assessment, not intractable conflict, we are not going to continue on as we did last fall to “policy prescriptions,” as that is beyond my interpretation of the scope of this class.

- We will, however, use our maps to identify “ripe areas” for what Guy calls “massively parallel peacebuilding.” I will explain that concept more in week 3.
- You may do the mapping assignment alone, or you may work in groups of 2 or 3 (3 is max). Keep in mind, if you work in a group, you will be expected to do twice or three times the work of individuals. It is not “an easy way out”—but it might be more fun! (It can also create an opportunity for practicing your conflict resolution skills when things go wrong).
- While I hope your maps will be clear enough to largely stand on their own, some documentation of your thinking and their meaning is important. So in addition to the graphical maps themselves, you will be expected to turn in a text-based description of what the maps show and what the peacebuilding (or conflict transformation) implications are of your maps. This can be done as a separate word document, or as part of the map itself using power point, prezi, a website, or other computer-based mapping program.
- You will also be asked to do a brief (2-3 page) analysis of the implications of your maps, discussing how applying a systems paradigm, “ripeness analysis,” and/or “massively parallel peacebuilding might enable a transformation of your conflict while the traditional “old paradigm” has not.
- Grading Summary:
 - Reading Reflections 18% (6 points each, 18 points total)
 - Attendance and Participation 17 % (17 points)
 - Project Proposal 5% (5 points)
 - Day 5 Presentation 10% (10 points)
 - Final Conflict Maps and Documentation 40 % (40 points)
 - Conflict Map Analysis 10% (10 points)
 - Total: 100 points

Weekly schedule:

Week 1 – March 26

- **Readings:** Optional (but encouraged) readings due today (sent out by email and available on Blackboard)
 - Hauss, Chapter 1
 - Vallacher et al.
- **Written assignments:** none due this week.
- **In-class activities:**
 - Introductions
 - Chip’s “booktalk”
 - Chip’s causes of conflict, “brainstorming” exercise

- Discussion of notions of “intractable conflict,” “wicked problems,” “complexity,” “paradigms” and other key concepts.
- Overview of the rest of the course – tracks, readings, discussions, maps, assignments, etc.

Week 2 – April 2

- **Readings** due today:
 - Hauss Chapter 1 if you didn’t do it before, and Chapter 2.
 - Ricigliano, *Making Peace Last* - Chapter 1-2 Note: Chapter 1 helps set of the context, but the material I really want you to focus on is in Chapter 2.
 - [Jenal on Making Peace Last](#). This is a succinct, well written review of Ricigliano's whole book which is a good, very quick substitute for reading the whole thing. It brings up most of the key ideas, many of which we will discuss more in class.
 - Vallacher et al. Optional: (I realize this is a lot of reading for this week, especially if you didn’t reach Chip’s chapter one earlier.) So this is the least essential and is not necessary at all if you did it earlier or have read Coleman. The other readings, however, are pretty important.)
- **Written assignments**
 - **Reading reflection set one** due 5 pm Tuesday April 1 to the Blackboard discussion board. See description of those above.
 - **Term topic proposal** also due 5 pm Tuesday April 1. Earlier submissions are welcome, and I will try to respond asap, so you can get started on your research quickly.
- **In-class activities:**
 - Discussion of your reading reflections.
 - Further discussion of Chip’s Chapter 2.
 - Review of basic and more advanced conflict mapping techniques, particularly adding SAT elements into the mix.
 - Application of these mapping techniques to Ukraine and/or Syria.

Week 3 – April 9

- **Readings** due today:
 - Hauss Chapter 3 and 4
 - Boulding “General Systems Theory—The Skeleton of Science.” **Note:** this article is very old – 1956 – and some of the things it says are no longer true. But two of its basic arguments still are, and they are very important and largely forgotten. Most important of these is the notion of a hierarchy of complexity, which Boulding starts to discuss on page 202 (or 133, depending on which set of page numbers you are looking at.)
 - Jones “[Complex Adaptive Systems](#)”
- **Written assignments**
 - **Reading reflection set two** due 5 pm Tuesday April 8 to the Blackboard discussion board. See description of those above.

- **In-class activities:**
 - Discussion of your reading reflections and Chip's Chapters 3 and 4.
 - Discussion of General Systems Theory and the distinction between "complex" and "complicated" as differentiated by Wendell Jones.
 - Comparison of different images of "systems" and "complexity" and the implications thereof: Chip's, Coleman's, Ricigliano's, Jones's, Boulding's, and Heidi and Guy's.
 - Application of some of these ideas to Ukraine, Syria, and/or "your conflicts."

Week 4 – April 16

- **Readings due today:**
 - Hauss Chapters 5, 6, and ??? (We'll see how much is written by then.)
- **Written assignments**
 - **Reading reflection set three** due 5 pm Tuesday April 15 to the Blackboard discussion board. See description of those above.
- **In-class activities:**
 - Discussion of your reading reflections.
 - Discussion of Chip's Chapters 5 and 6
 - Introduction of Guy's and Heidi's concepts of "ripe places" and "massively parallel peacebuilding."
 - Consideration of how Chip's "new paradigm" relates to that, and how both apply to Ukraine, Syria, and/or "your conflicts."

Week 5: -- April 23

- **Readings due today:** none
- **Written assignments**
 - Conflict maps and documentation due for in-class presentation today and written versions are due in the Blackboard dropbox by 9 pm Sunday April 27.
 - No reading reflections due today
- **In-class activities:**
 - Presentation and discussion of maps
 - Discussion of the difference between complexity/systems "thinking" and conflict assessment and "assessment as usual."
 - Where we (all) go from here – what we have learned, what we need to learn, what we want to do about it.