



Constructive Conflict: Filling a Gap in the University Curriculum

Final Report Submitted to

Institute for Ethical and Civic Engagement (IECE)

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Guy Burgess, Ph.D. and Heidi Burgess, Ph.D.

Instructors: Peace and Conflict Studies, Communication

Co-Directors, Conflict Information Consortium

* Formerly the Conflict Research Consortium

Campus Box 580, University of Colorado, Room A222, ARC Bldg. 3100 Marine Street, Boulder, CO 80309

Phone: (303) 492-1635; Fax: (303) 492-2154; burgess@colorado.edu; <http://conflict.colorado.edu>

Summary

From our base with the Peace and Conflict Studies Program (PACS) and the Conflict Information Consortium, we have, under the IECE Constructive Conflict grant, created a series of interdisciplinary materials for use in social conflict and problem solving courses. The materials provide tools that will help students better navigate the inevitable conflicts that will accompany their efforts to promote positive social change. These materials have been deeply integrated into the three core PACS courses. And, with the forthcoming posting of the project website, they are being made available to the larger PACS faculty, the University community, and the University's various "outreach" constituents.

This report includes the following sections:

- A summary of improvements that were made to the basic project design over the past year.
- A listing of the courses in which the materials were used during the past year including the URL for the course syllabi and materials,
- A listing of the courses in which the materials will be used during the coming year,

- Project website information.
- Outreach activities,
- Learning system sections,
- Program modules, and
- Financial statement.

Project Enhancements

Over the past year we have made a number of "no-cost" enhancements to the IECE project design which we believe strengthen the overall product without undermining our initial objective. These enhancements include:

- **Civic-Minded Focus**

The events of the last year, including the election of President Obama, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the worsening problems of global warming and infectious disease, and, especially, the economic crisis have led us to refine our initial image of constructive conflict and positive social change. As we see it, these events have all highlighted the dangers of making important social decisions without adequately considering the civic impact of those decisions. This has led us to emphasize conflict resolution and policy making efforts that include a strong civic-minded component that protects the interests of the larger community (not just the immediate parties to a dispute).

Such civic-mindedness is essential to efforts to avoid the many "tragedies of the commons" which threaten society. These tragedies include, most obviously, the global warming problem, along with efforts to combat infectious disease and restore the viability of the global financial system. Similarly, the core challenge in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan is to foster a sense of civic-mindedness within those societies.

- **Complexity-oriented, "Make a Difference" Modules**

Another important refinement that we made to the project focuses on improving the way in which we address the scale and complexity of civic problems. Society's ability to successfully address a broad range of social problems is determined by the cumulative actions of thousands (if not millions) of individuals. In this context, it can be very difficult for students to see how anything that they do can truly "make a difference."

To more clearly address this issue, we retitled our program, "Making a Difference: Constructive Change through Civic-Minded Approaches to Conflict." Our goal is to combat the "free rider" problem by showing students how they really can make a difference *and* have a life.

- **Partner Projects**

The third major way in which we have been able to advance the project is through an informal series of partnerships with the Peace and Conflict Studies Program and other efforts of the Conflict Information Consortium. This additional support has meant that we have

been able to develop a much broader range of materials. This approach has, however, led to minor delays in the posting of the IECE project website (currently planned for late June or early July 2009). Over the longer term, we expect to add additional IECE website components based on partner project activities.

These additional source of support for the project included:

- *University Courses* – Project materials were developed, tested, and refined in conjunction with the 9 different, project-related classes that we taught over the last year. (See project related courses below). Much of this summer's course development work is also being incorporated into the IECE project website.
- *Civic-minded Approaches to Conflict Conference* – Over the past year, we have been developing plans for a conference that will identify and bring to campus scholars and practitioners doing "frontier of the field" work related to civic-minded approaches to governance. We expect to draw participants from civilian government, military, commercial, and nonprofit sectors with a focus on environmental, economic, security, and social issues. Many of the ideas developed in the course of planning this conference are being incorporated into IECE project (including the civic-mindedness theme).
- *Alternative Governance Knowledge Base Grant* – Under a grant received from One Earth Future and the Arsenault Family Foundation we have been expanding our knowledge base of information on innovative new civic governance models which is being added to the IECE system knowledge base.
- *Conflict Information Consortium Website Upgrades* – For years, the Consortium has been assembling suggestions for improving its online knowledge base and learning systems. This summer we will be implementing the best of these suggestions. Many of the core elements of the IECE website will employ features developed as part of this work.
- *Complexity Oriented-Peacebuilding Course* – A major, ongoing focus of the Consortium's Intractable Conflict project has been the development of courses which teach people how to make a difference in very large-scale and extraordinarily complex conflict situations. The central elements of this approach are being incorporated into the IECE materials in ways which highlight the many opportunities that students have for making a difference.
- *Center for Conflict, Collaboration, and Creative Governance* – Finally, the IECE project is one of the featured activities of this new University research and teaching center.

Project-Related 2008/2009 Courses

Over the past year the IECE project has contributed directly to the following courses and sections of those courses. The listing below includes the instructor and the number of students taught. Also included, for the latest version of each course, is the URL for the course syllabus and online materials (many of which are linked from the daily "Power Point" slides).

- Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies – PACS2500
 - Fall 2008 – Section 2 – Guy Burgess – 40 Students
 - Spring 2009 – Baker RAP – Heidi Burgess – 17 Students
 - Spring 2009 – Section 2 – Guy Burgess – 37 Students – <http://conflict.colorado.edu/pacs2500-s09/>
- Communication and Conflict Management – PACS3800 / COMM300
 - Fall 2008 – Section 1 – Heidi Burgess – 35 Students
 - Spring 2009 – Section 1 – Heidi Burgess – 33 Students
 - June 2009 – Section 1 – Heidi Burgess – 18 Students – <http://conflict.colorado.edu/pacs3800-su09/>
- Political Communication – COMM
 - Fall 2008 – Section 1 – Guy Burgess – 45 Students – <http://conflict.colorado.edu/COMM3340/>
- Senior Seminar and Peace and Conflict Studies – PACS4500
 - Spring 2009 – Section 1 – Guy Burgess – 29 Students
 - Spring 2009 – Section 2 – Guy Burgess – 18 Students – <http://conflict.colorado.edu/pacs4500-s09/>

Project-Related 2009/2010 Courses

In the coming year the materials will be applied to the following courses with continuing use expected in subsequent years.

- Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies – PACS2500
 - Fall 2009 – Section 1 – Guy Burgess – ~70 Students
 - Fall 2009 – Section 2 – Heidi Burgess – ~ 40 Students
- Communication and Conflict Management – PACS3800 / COMM300
 - Fall 2009 – Section 1 – Heidi Burgess – ~ 40 Students
 - Spring 2010 – Section 1 – Heidi Burgess – ~ 40 Students
- Senior Seminar and Peace and Conflict Studies – PACS4500
 - Spring 2009 – Section 1 – Guy Burgess – ~ 25 Students
- Continuing Education Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies – PACS2500
 - Online Course – Heidi Burgess – ~ 60 Students
- Topics in Peace and Conflict Studies pacs 3800
 - Online Course (Different from the face-to-face version) – ~ 50 students

Project Website

By early July we will be making the materials available to University students and faculty teaching the disciplinary courses included in the Peace and Conflict Studies Certificate Program as well as University faculty more generally. These materials will be accessible from either of the following addresses. (More information about the content of this website is found in subsequent sections of this report.)

- <http://making-a-difference.beyondintractability.org>
- <http://conflict.colorado.edu/making-a-difference/>

Outreach Activities

Many of the IECE materials will be incorporated into the new versions of the Consortium's publicly accessible knowledge base systems, including:

- Beyond Intractability – the website of the Intractable Conflict Knowledge Base Project – <http://www.beyondintractability.org/>
- CRInfo – the Conflict Resolution Information Source – <http://www.crinfo.org/>

These systems are currently attracting almost 200,000 unique users per month worldwide.

In addition, and as funds become available, we will be integrating the materials into several informal, online training resources offered through Conflict Information Consortium's websites. These include:

- Stop Fighting – <http://stop-fighting.crinfo.org/>
- Dealing Constructively with Intractable Conflict – <http://www.beyondintractability.org/DCIC/>
- Conflict 101 – <http://crinfo.beyondintractability.org/c101/>

IECE Learning System Sections

The learning system that we've developed gives students (and working adults—for the project's outreach component) the tools they need to "make a difference" by helping society more constructively handle conflicts over a broad range of civic issues. The system includes the following major components:

- **Contemporary Civic Challenges:** *How business-as-usual practices threaten everyone's future.*

A great many students do not adequately understand the seriousness of the many global and regional-scale problems that threaten their future. The first, critical section of the website addresses this problem with quick summaries of the major challenges and an explanation of the importance of promoting more effective civic action. This is the "need step" for the IECE learning materials. We want students to understand why it is so important that they help address these issues.

Specific issues addressed in this section include:

- The economic crisis
- National security and, especially, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

- Global warming and other environmental problems
 - Failed states, tyranny, and genocide
 - Inequality, discrimination, poverty
- **Opportunities for Individual Contributions:** *Dispelling the myth that individual actions can't change the course of events.*
 With a look into the practical aspects of complexity theory, this section explains the wisdom of Margaret Mead's famous admonition, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." We explain how the specialized skills that students are acquiring can, if thoughtfully applied, enable them to make a difference, enjoy a rewarding career, while still "having a life."

NOTE: This section will be backed up by a last section which provides very practical advice to individuals on how to find and prepare themselves for "make-a-difference" roles that are consistent with their talents, personality, skills, and lifestyle preferences.
 - **Tragedies of the Commons** — *The inevitable result of decision-making processes that undervalue civic interests.*
 This section explains the tragedy of the commons and related problems which we see as the common thread that underlies many civic challenges highlighted in the first section of IECE system. Our argument is that the big civic problems are, in one way or another, attributable to decision-making process that resolve policy disputes in ways that advance the narrow interests of individuals at the expense of interests to the larger society— the commons. This section, for example, explains the limits of Adam Smith's "invisible hand" and the dangers of unrestrained competition which can produce an "invisible fist" as well as the exploitation problem which, among equally efficient producers, gives a competitive advantage to the most ruthless exploiter.
 - **Essential Insights** — *Things that everyone ought to know about threats to the commons and strategies for protecting it.*
 Protecting the commons is much more easily said than done. The success of individual efforts to protect the commons and promote civic responsibility are ultimately limited by an individual's understanding of the conflict and decision-making dynamics which lead people to act, often unintentionally, in ways either undermine both their interests and the interests of the larger society. In addition to explaining the challenges to effective civic engagement, this section also includes a primer on strategies for meeting these challenges.
 - **Civic Roles** – *Protecting the commons requires simultaneous contributions from the great many people in a wide range of social roles.*
 Protecting the commons is a complex process that is only possible when large numbers of people, each with different, specialized skills, assume specialized roles and take responsibility for different aspects of the overall problem. This component of the IECE project inventories these roles (careers) and explains how they work together for the benefit of all.

More specifically, we explore contributions that are required by individuals and organizations engaged in each of five basic types of programs:

- *Human needs programs* — designed to help assure that everyone's basic needs are met,
- *Common purpose programs* — designed to help limit intergroup tensions and promote mutual respect, tolerance, coexistence, and a sense of common purpose, among diverse populations struggling with cultural, economic, and other differences.
- *Negotiation-related programs* — which enable people to identify and pursue opportunities for mutually beneficial activities,
- *Democratic institutions* — for cases where disputes cannot be resolved through mutually acceptable agreement, political and legal institutions are needed to resolve these disputes based on principles of majority rule with the protection of individual and especially minority rights.
- *Violence-limiting programs* — organizations such as military and the police which provide the collective security needed to restrain those who seek to illegitimately advance their interests through violent means.

While these roles and levels are conceptually distinct and while many individuals and organizations specialize in just one area, it is also common for large-scale efforts to focus on making sure that all of these roles are filled. This is, in fact, the central objective of large-scale efforts undertaken under a variety of rubrics including peace-building, nation-building, democratization, SSTR (security, stabilization, transition, and reconstruction, and conflict transformation. While these concepts generally apply this society-wide, violent conflicts (generally civil war and efforts to overthrow or recover from tyrannical regimes), the same concepts also efforts to heal nonviolent political divisions such as Barack Obama's efforts to promote post-partisan approaches to political issues.

- **Social Interaction Skills** — *These public policy dispute handling skills can greatly increase the effectiveness of people working in a broad range of civic roles.*

The ability of individuals to successfully fulfill each of the above roles as well as handle the routine conflicts associated with everyday living can be dramatically enhanced by mastering a number of key conflict skills. This section of the IECE system provides the basic training materials in each of the following areas.

- *Visualizing the Web of Relationships* – The first step toward building support for (and limiting opposition to) constructive civic engagement efforts is a well-developed ability to see the web of relationships within which we all live. These materials will help students anticipate how others are likely to respond to alternative courses of action.
- *Developing Legitimate Aspirations* – We all need the ability to restrain our own ambitions in light of their impact on others in our community. This requires living by widely-accepted principles of fairness (and not just developing clever, "greed is good" rationalizations).

- *Crossing Cultural Barriers* – Basic cross-cultural communication skills and enable people to defuse widely misunderstood tensions which commonly arise between different cultural groups (even within the same society).
 - *Communication* – The core communication skills covered in this section give students: 1) the ability to convey their ideas without spawning unnecessary resistance and hostility; 2) the ability to really hear and empathize with what others are saying; and 3) the ability to resist all too common, deceptive propaganda.
 - *Working with Facts / Making Sensible Use of Experts* – In our complex world, we can only successfully protect the commons by making full use of available technical expertise (while also understanding its inherent limitations). This section covers strategies for doing this.
 - *Balancing Persuasion, Negotiation, and Force* – Effective advocacy requires an ability to effectively use and combine these three basic types of civic power.
 - *Persuasion* – In a world dominated by force, people tend to neglect the development of the persuasive skills covered in this section. These skills produce the most stable form of social change by persuading others that what is being asked of them is reasonable and worthy of their voluntary compliance .
 - *Negotiation* – While a great many opportunities for win-win agreements exist, people often don't know how to find and take advantage of these opportunities. This section covers and negotiation skills needed to do this.
 - *Constructive Force* – For those unfortunate situations where force is the only viable option for addressing intolerable injustice, this section shows people how to use force constructively and in ways that limit the "backlash" effect.
 - *Mediation and Related Intermediary Skills*. For situations in which the parties alone are unable to see a way forward, this part of the system explains how the services of mediators and other (usually neutral) intermediaries can be invaluable.
- **Making a Difference** — *How to find the right place for you!*
 The last component of the IECE system is a series of modules designed to help students find the right place for them in the larger effort to promote civic engagement. Primarily designed for people who are in the process of making career choices, the system will also include advice for people who are already involved in civic issues and looking for ways in which they could have the greatest impact. Among the components of this part of the system are the following modules:
 - *Tipping Point Identification* – This part of the program helps students find situations in which their actions are most likely to make a critical, positive difference.
 - *Joining and Working with Interest Groups* – Effective civic action is only possible when those with similar interests band together to take action collectively. This part of the IECE website offers advice on how to identify (or create) organizations with which one might want to work and how to work oneself into positions of responsibility.
 - *Skill Acquisition* – Effective civic action is a learned skill. One's ability to be effective depends on training and experience. This part of the website focuses on practical

- advice for getting this training and experience, starting with University of Colorado programs.
- *Personality / Talent Assessment* – Everyone's effectiveness (and happiness) is enhanced when they pursue roles that are consistent with their own personalities and talents. This section would highlight things that people should think about when deciding how best to focus their energies.

Program Modules

The basic IECE website consists of three basic types of modules. There are "table of contents" modules that list "virtual shelves" that students can browse along with a powerful search engine. Also to be included is the ability for instructors to craft customized primary and supplemental textbooks for use in face-to-face courses. Over the longer term and depending on available funding we hope to add new and upgrade existing online courses based on the materials. Some of this will be done this summer as we create the online version of PACS2500.

Beyond this, there are topic-oriented modules that, for each topic, provide a variety of learning materials that together support the full range of learning styles. These include, where appropriate, the following:

- Title with more informative subtitle,
- Flash animation highlighting key features of the module and/or "quotable quote" inset text boxes,
- Module abstract or description (one paragraph),
- Where available links to humorous or attention grabbing multimedia materials highlighting key module points (e.g. Jon Stewart clips),
- PowerPoint lecture slides with online audio and, where available, lecture transcripts,
- Links to short (encyclopedia) articles highlighting key points (generally from Beyond Intractability),
- Where available, links to materials that convey key module lessons in a more emotive level (e.g. links to moving documentaries describing civic problems and more constructive approaches to those problems),
- Where available, links to in-depth sources of more advanced information,
- Classroom (and self-study) exercises and assignments,
- Instructor notes (where needed), and
- Student / instructor feedback and contribution form

Financial Statement

Project funds were fully expended in accordance with the project budget. However, due to errors in the processing of these and related financial transactions, not all of these expenditures have cleared the project speed type. (Some may have been charged to other accounts and expense transfers may be required.) We thought that all of these errors would have been corrected on the April 2009

statement. However, in reviewing the April statement, it became clear that additional changes will still be required. We are now processing those changes

Project Co-directors

- Guy Burgess 2,000
- Heidi Burgess 2,000

Research Assistant

- Mike Torley 1,000
- TOTAL 5,000