

Non-violent Conflict Resolution
Faculty responses regarding initiatives already underway in the classroom

Dr. Glenn Littlepage pylittle@mtsu.edu

In my **PSY 2210** (Psychology of Social Behavior) course, we cover Intergroup behavior. That section deals with ingroup-outgroup bias, prejudice, discrimination, etc. Students can earn extra credit by completing the Implicit Attitude Test that measures automatic preferences for various groups (racial, religious, sexual orientation, etc.). Most students choose to take this online test. The course also includes a brief section on conflict resolution. The course covers aggression as well and includes information about the prevalence of handguns, assault weapons, and knives as instruments of murder and about the high frequency of murders that involve escalating arguments and that involve the use of alcohol.

In my **PSY 4380** course we cover conflict resolution in some detail. We discuss a number of options for nonviolently resolving conflicts. We generally do a small in-class exercise about finding an integrative solution to a conflict.

Sharon S. Smith sssmith@mtsu.edu

Since the year 2002, I have taught a course on conflict in the workplace. It is part of the major in Organizational Communication, and it's ORCO 3650 Conflict and Organizations. We offer three or four sections of this course each academic year.

In the course, we cover conflict escalation and avoidance, stages and spirals of conflict, difficult coworkers, productive and destructive conflict interaction, misconduct and whistleblowing, the role of policies and procedures (such as grievance, progressive discipline, termination) in managing conflict, workplace violence and bullying, and the role of health issues and policies in managing conflict (substance abuse, drug testing, smoking, injuries, diseases).

Students also learn about mediation and negotiation in resolving conflict situations, and they complete an experiential learning assignment (EXL) in which they identify a conflict situation in their lives and actually negotiate.

Donovan, Ellen

edonovan@mtsu.edu

While not directly related to "non-violence" I do include on my **Engl 1020** syllabus a civility statement. Here it is verbatim:

Another part of this class is learning how to discuss ideas civilly. You may be required to read essays and articles that you don't agree with or that you may even find offensive. Your task, in that case, is to learn to articulate the reasons why the argument you have read is not valid and to communicate those reasons in class with sound logic and a civil tone.

Casal, Elvira

ecasal@mtsu.edu

Faculty: Do you include any component in your classes that could be described as an effort to increase understanding between diverse groups, promote peace, or otherwise encourage nonviolence and understanding? Do you teach any topics within your classes related to conflict resolution or effective interpersonal communication? Please take a moment to describe it, including as much detail as you can. Please indicate if this is an ongoing or recent endeavor, and include dates.

As a teacher of literature and composition, I have many opportunities to assign texts that give rise to discussions about peace and understanding. In these discussions, I encourage students to see "the other side" even when "the other side" seems patently wrong. I believe that encouraging people to think about how others feel, and (through discussion of links between literary texts and our own times/experiences) helping students see that our common human experience unites us all is the key to fighting prejudice and misunderstanding.

Similarly, there are texts that open the discussion to issues of violence/non-violence and the cultural and individual price that people pay for war, abuse, gang-related activity etc. It is important to help students see beyond the binary oppositions of "us/them," "good/bad," "black/white," "male/female," "rich/poor," "strong/weak" etc. Helping students define themselves in a way that encompasses multiple ways of being is a major step in promoting harmony and understanding.

A writing exercise that I often use in my composition classes is to ask students to write a rough draft about a topic that they feel strongly about (abortion, gun control, prayer in the schools, military intervention in the Middle East, "entitlement programs" etc.) and pair them up for debate with people who hold precisely the opposite view. Only after discussing their ideas with a person who will critique their perspective are they allowed to work on the final paper. The purpose of the assignment is to make their papers better by (a) addressing the points the opposition makes and (b) recognizing the perspective of the opposition as having equal value to one's own (because it has been thought out and reflects a moral/political position) even while (in most cases) continuing to hold one's own views. In other words, the assignment is about learning to respect those with whom we disagree.

To me, it all comes down to teaching respect through communication and examination of different perspectives. There is a story by Toni Morrison called "Recitatif," in which two women (one white/one black) who meet as children in a state home find themselves united at times (by their experiences) and on opposite sides (in terms of social class and political position) at other times. What is fascinating about the story is that you can never tell for sure which of the characters is white and which is black. It gives rise to a lot of great discussions.

I also find that horror fiction and discussion of horror film makes a great beginning to discussion of the way in which we are desensitized to violence until we experience it ourselves. Most students accept this as a truism. However, the trick is to make them put themselves in the situation, to engage imaginatively with it. Could they be/have they ever been victims? Could they be/have they ever been victimizers? (You don't ask for confessions here. You ask them to think about what they would do in a situation from a story or play.)

Rape is a subject that all our students are concerned about. Since a fair number of literary works depict male/female violence and/or coercion, it is often easy to lead the discussion to the feelings/perceptions and attitudes in the work that may carry over to contemporary times.

I don't have specific times and dates and "programs" for these discussions because they happen all the time in my classes depending on what we are studying and how the students respond to specific texts. I have been doing this type of thing since I first began teaching--and certainly for the past 17 years at MTSU.

I could easily put together a "respect and non-violence" module based on literature if I needed, but because of the style of my classes, I just try to imbue the whole class with a sense of respectful dialogue and understanding.

Faculty, Staff and Students: Are you involved in any club or activity that could be described as promoting tolerance and nonviolence at MTSU? Please describe it and include dates.

The Women's Studies Council is always concerned about tolerance and non-violence. Women and Gender Studies classes tend to promote tolerance and accept diversity. Our recent conference (March 2011) specifically promoted a global understanding and respect for race and gender diversity.

I was for many years the chair of the "Diversity Sub-Committee" of the Presidents Commission on the Status of Women. We tried to promote respect for diversity through book drives (to donate appropriate books to pre-school programs and school libraries) and various talks and panels addressing such issues as "Neither black nor white" (race/ethnic issues beyond the two polar opposites) and "addressing difficult questions about race and gender in the classroom." These happened in the last 5-10 years.

Are there any other ways that you are involved in promoting understanding between diverse groups at MTSU, encouraging nonviolent solutions to conflicts at MTSU, and generally promoting a peaceful campus? Please describe your activities in as much detail as you can.

When appropriate, I will wear buttons and other symbols.

Marchant, Jennifer marchant@mtsu.edu

I don't know if this would count, but, as an English teacher, I make it a point to teach texts representing a diverse group (both in terms of authors and characters). For example, in my Literature for Adolescents class this semester, students read about various ethnic groups (African-American, Asian-American, Native American, Iranian), different socioeconomic classes, and read about one character with autism. Such reading helps students to get a sense of others' points of view, and gives them a chance to "walk in someone else's shoes" for a while.

Seward, Lynn lseward@mtsu.edu

In response to your query about courses that address issues of diversity and conflict resolution: Communication Studies, a program within the Speech and Theatre Department, has several courses that address these issues. In fact, a central tenet of the program is that we must learn to communicate with people who are different from us in order to have effective communication interpersonally, in groups, and globally.

Here are some of our courses:

Interpersonal Communication: Examines a communication model that explores the many aspects that affect communication between two people. The course then analyzes the various components of the model throughout the semester. The goals of the course include increased understanding of the process as well as learning how to adapt to different situations/people. Sample topics include:

how verbal communication can diminish or encourage others, effective – and ineffective- approaches to conflict, how nonverbal communication affects communication, an introduction to cultural differences in communication, selective perception, perspective taking, etc.

Intercultural Communication: Focuses on the values, perceptions and communication patterns found in cultures around the world. Included in the course are explorations of concepts like "face," "shame cultures," context and how conflict is handled differently in various cultures.

Diversity in Communication: Focuses on intergroup relationships by people of different ethnic and racial groups within the U.S. Topics include: identity, assimilation, prejudice, perceptions, and conflict negotiation.

Communication in the Middle East: While the Intercultural Communication course examines the values, perceptions and communication patterns found in cultures around the world, this course focuses specifically on cultures in the Middle East. In addition to examining how conflict is approached, attention is also spent on the role of religion as well as issues concerning gender.

Small Group Communication: Making an effective decision in a group requires an understanding of how group members interact (member and leadership roles; differing communication styles, etc), steps for critical analysis in decision- making, and how to analyze and deal with conflict in a group setting.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to let me know.

Hemby, Virginia kvhemby@mtsu.edu

Faculty: Do you include any component in your classes that could be described as an effort to increase understanding between diverse groups, promote peace, or otherwise encourage nonviolence and understanding? Do you teach any topics within your classes related to conflict resolution or effective interpersonal communication? Please take a moment to describe it, including as much detail as you can. Please indicate if this is an ongoing or recent endeavor, and include dates.

In **BCEN3510**, Business Communication (a departmental course), we include all areas related to communication in the workplace—including interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, intergenerational communication, etc. This information has always been covered in this course—since its inception.

With regard to interpersonal communication, we stress the importance of being able to communicate in a face-to-face environment with emphasis on nonverbal communication as the major component in that situation. We cover the types of nonverbal communication (proxemics, kinesics, and paralanguage) and their purposes in the interpersonal environment so that students are aware of the importance of listening, observing, and talking in a face-to-face setting. We stress that 93% of what is conveyed in a face-to-face setting is nonverbal (i.e., not what you say but how you say it). We also teach students to use a positive tone, positive words, and positive actions when communicating with others—whether speaking or writing. One important aspect of Business Communication is that we always focus on the need for individuals to be positive in all facets of communication because building a customer base and retaining existing customers are both vital to the success of any business. Even when we teach the chapter on delivering negative news or bad news, we have students select positive words and use a buffer paragraph to help the reader or receiver of the bad news connect with the writer or speaker.

We discuss intergenerational communication as it relates to the work environment because students will be actively engaging with a minimum of three generations in their future careers and need to have a firm understanding of how each of these generations function in the workplace—including their communication strategies and their beliefs with regard to work. We talk about potential conflicts between generations and discuss ways in which individuals can attempt to effectively mediate those situations. We talk about stereotypes of members of specific generations and how sometimes the stereotypical persona may not be representative of the individuals with whom you work. Saying that Baby Boomers, for example, avoid the use of technology, do not like technology, are afraid of change, or refuse to change, are all based on the stereotype of the Baby Boomer and not true of each individual born into that generation. Therefore, we teach students in Business Communication to be mindful of making assumptions about colleagues simply because of their age.

We continue with similar discussions in regard to intercultural communication since both generations and cultures are part of the diversity one will encounter in the workplace. In some sections of the Business Communication course, instructors have students create and deliver presentations focusing on the culture of specific countries—identifying ways in which we as a U.S. citizen would need to adapt to that culture in order to be successful were we to conduct business there.

In my **BCEN4640/5640**, Issues and Trends in Office Management course, I have students read *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job* by Patrick Lencioni. This reader tells students that the underlying factors that make a job miserable are anonymity, irrelevance, and immeasurability—and all three of these factors apply to workers in virtually any job regardless of the nature of the work. The information in this book helps students who desire to become Office Managers understand the importance of communication with their employees—seeing each individual employee as a person and not merely as a cog in a wheel, recognizing the accomplishments of each individual employee, taking the time to learn something about each individual employee. My students have all expressed appreciation for the course requirement of reading this text. They feel they have a better understanding of how important interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, and intergenerational communication can be to the success of an organization.

In this course, I also assign informational reports in which students are to focus on a current issue or trend in the workplace as it relates to Office Management. Students elect to report on Managing Conflict in the Workplace, Managing Employees with Emotional and Psychiatric Disabilities, Managing Gender Diversity in the Workplace, Managing Generations in the Workplace, Managing Individual Differences—Values and Personality—in the Workplace, etc. Each student must select a different issue or trend—no duplication of topics allowed. Prior to selecting their topic, however, students have completed at least half of the course and have been exposed to several of these issues and/or trends in their readings and course discussions.

Austin, Jill jaustin@mtsu.edu

The EXL Scholars Program has a student learning outcome that states:

Students will make contributions to their communities and learn the value of making these contributions (good citizenship); students will develop as individuals including understanding the needs of others, learning cultural awareness, and appreciating the differences in others.

Faculty must select two of the six outcomes to assess in their EXL classes and select two additional outcomes from a list of four. This outcome is one that is an option. Currently, there are 64 EXL courses that include this learning outcome as expectation for the course and the learning outcome is used by 48 different faculty. Courses from each college are in this list.

We will have assessment data for this year soon. Data is available for this outcome from NSSE (from last year), from a survey of students in EXL classes, and from this outcome result from the **EXL 4000** class. I can provide more information if it is needed.

***Additional Response:**

Hello again,

We have an organization in our department called **Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE)** where students work with not-for-profits on service projects. One of the goals is to build cultural awareness and understanding. For example, this year, the group is working with Journey Home to build a greenhouse and plant a community garden. They are learning about homelessness and problems that result. Each year, they do multiple projects to help students learn about people who may be different from them.

This may not fit your survey, but wanted to give you the information just in case.

Bombardi, Ron rbombard@mtsu.edu

There are a number of ways in which the entire undergraduate philosophy curriculum provides many of the conceptual tools and cognitive skills necessary for effective non-violent conflict resolution. However, one course in particular, **Philosophy 2110** (Elementary Logic and Critical Thinking) is especially noteworthy because it is specifically designed to enhance the rational appraisal of divergent and disputed views.

One syllabus for **PHIL 2110**, for example, says: "The primary objective of this course is to impart a functional ability to reason well; to improve your analytical skills and instincts. In addition to familiarizing you with elementary methods of argument composition and analysis, the course is further designed to aid you in understanding the essential principles involved in the theory and practice of reasoned decision making." It is quite common for this course to emphasize the importance of critical reasoning for democratic societies--where rational argument provides our most reliable method for resolving social, political, and practical disputes without resort to violence, domination, intimidation, or other unreasoned efforts to control the course of events or the lives of others.

Other philosophy courses that are specifically designed to foster understanding between diverse groups, and therefore to promote peace, or otherwise encourage nonviolence and understanding include:

PHIL 3300 - Philosophy of Religion

PHIL 3690 - Social Philosophy

PHIL 3150 - Ethics

PHIL 3200 - Asian Thought

Similarly, the following courses in religious studies are noteworthy on this score:

RS 3020 - Comparative Religion

RS 4050 - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

PHIL 3500 - Philosophy & the African-American Experience

Bratten, L. Clare

cbratten@mtsu.edu

I taught a women's studies class this spring and we spent time talking about the stabbing and what other strategies each woman could have used to avoid escalating the conflict. I taught them a bit about how the brain registers anger (fight/flight) and the impulse to act before the frontal cortex (thinking rationally) can even become mobilized and how to train yourself to count to 10 slowly (the old bromide) actually gives your frontal cortex time to engage. Also did some teaching around 'reflective listening' rather than 'not listening and just waiting to get your point in'.

I think there should be a section in **UNIV1010** on interpersonal relations/conflict resolution. There is a strategy I learned along the way of how two people in conflict can do reflective listening -- each taking turns with the other listening (without interruption) and even summarizing the points the other person just made (and having that person confirm that he/she has been heard correctly). Then they switch and do the reverse and take turns until each feels s/he has been heard. I did not have them try/model it and I wish I had but it's hard to manufacture a disagreement between 2 people in a class and I feared it might seem 'off topic' from the class.

In every media studies class I teach, I teach about race, class, gender, sexual orientation and power inequities and how the media portrays those groups (often stereotyped) and how that affects the experience of those groups who are part of the "audience." The goal is to sensitize people to the injuries or discrimination of other groups.

McCormick, Janet

jmccormi@mtsu.edu

Another **ORCO** course that addresses the issue of violence/non-violence conflict resolution in the workplace is **ORCO 3500 Strategic Communication in Organizations**. This course is designed to be an examination of organizational communication and its relationship to power and influence, leadership, corporate culture, diversity, change and innovation. Significant workplace relationships studied include: superior /subordinate, peers/colleagues (internal), clients/customers, vendors/suppliers, lenders/investors (external). Through this course, students engage in systematic analysis of employee/er communication during times of change as practiced by non-profit and for-profit organizations. This self-analysis as well as workplace dynamic analysis will allow students to explore the impact of such demographic variables as gender (biological sex), age, ethnicity, physical ability, credentials and experience; and psychological variables such as attitudes, values, beliefs (religion, culture, sexuality) in the context of organizational life.

Objectives:

Through this course, students demonstrate the ability to:

Examine critically the literature and theories of workplace relationships in organizations;

Analyze current research methodology on the many types of workplace relationships used in organizations;

Critique past and current practices of organizing relationships in the workplace;

Examine the roles of power and influence, leadership, diversity, and technology in organizational relationships;

Identify the frameworks of people, messages, channels, noise, feedback, context, and effect in the building/maintaining/ terminating of workplace relationships;

Self-assess strengths and weaknesses as they relate to organizational change;

Formulate strategies and processes for effective use of relational communication in organizations;

Create powerful and provocative ways of re-framing organizations

This is an EXL course which requires the students to conduct research in the community, identify opportunities for change (through SWOT analysis), and present their ideas regarding effective communication solutions. They write personal reflection papers throughout the course as well.

Issues of violence/non-violence in the workplace are addressed regularly.

Sanborn, John jsanborn@mtsu.edu

There are several courses offered in the Social Work Department that address the need for peaceful and productive processes for conflict resolution. It needs to be very much a part of our teaching students how to deal with the situations they will encounter as professional social workers.

Our **Interviewing Skills** class, which I sometimes teach and has been offered more frequently recently by Prof. Angela Pharris, includes content on communication and relationship development in difficult circumstances. Our **Cultural Diversity** course, offered most often by Dr. Jacqui Wade, deals with differences and how to work with diverse populations. Our Practice classes and Field Instruction seminars include considerable lectures and opportunities for student discussion on these topics.

A course that I often teach, **Social Work with Groups**, has content on the balance between opposition and accommodation in group processes that is central to learning how to work effectively with helping and task groups. We do role-playing and have class discussions that often focus on conflict management and resolution in important relationships, families, and other group arrangements.

I hope this information is relevant and helpful. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Wilson, Jean lbuckner@mtsu.edu
and
Buckner, Jean
(SIFE Advisors)

On November 18, 2010, the MTSU chapter of **Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE)** hosted Culture Fest 2010. This event invited the MTSU campus and surrounding community to "travel the world and enjoy the culture it holds." Approximately 400 people attended, including MTSU students, faculty, staff, and local schoolchildren and their families. Held in the Tom Jackson Building, Culture Fest celebrated diversity and tolerance by showcasing 16 exhibitors from different countries/religions, 8 speakers, 2 dance groups, and samplings of international cuisine.

SIFE students conceived the idea for Culture Fest as a response to the controversy surrounding the proposed Mosque in Murfreesboro. Instead of focusing on that one issue, the students felt that it would be more beneficial to take a broader approach to understanding and appreciating the diversity that makes MTSU, and Murfreesboro, a wonderful place to live, study and work.

Guests of the event were given "passports," which could be stamped at each booth. Exhibitors shared information about religion, language, styles of dress, art, music, sports, and many other aspects of the various cultures.

The event was such a success that **SIFE** is hosting Culture Fest 2011 on November 17 in the Tennessee Room.

Phalichanh, Justin P. phalicha@mtsu.edu

Hello, I teach a course in the Global Studies program called **Introduction to Cross-Cultural Studies**. It is a common theme throughout my entire course to discuss common problems and solutions in understanding cultures different from our own. Basic exercises such that include the students getting to know each other. It is very important to me in my classroom for the students to communicate between each other effectively. I often encourage class discussions to learn about each other and why we have different opinions. My job is to provide the students the forum to freely discuss, and the only time I ever provide my own input is when I am asked by my students.

Looking at global hot topics around the world, we've discussed a number of topics, such as the current issues going on in the Arab countries and then connecting the global to the local, looking at the issue of the mosques in Murfreesboro. I've encouraged my students to learn more about others, and why certain things are important to understand.

As far as specific exercises and activities, I have an in-class activity that allows students to learn about each other, covering a number of categories, learning about religion, sexual orientation, immigration status, gender, socio-economic class, age, and race. This activity requires students to respond to some statements that I read aloud and they choose which category fits them best. It is an interesting and enlightening activity, and describing it does no justice.

Overall, I promote conversation and public discourses to promote a healthy learning environment.

Tharp, Terri

ttharp@mtsu.edu

For all of my classes in the Elementary & Special Education Dept., students are placed in different groups each class period (use grouping pencils or cards) so that they get to know each other as quickly as possible. I feel knowing each other is an essential key for effective group work. Small group activities are included each class meeting, and I spend a class period (with occasional reminders throughout the semester!:) talking about group work and the importance of collaboration and respect in the education field. We review the four major rules for group work:

- 1) every member of each group is responsible for all work;
- 2) be open to and respectful of other members' ideas;
- 3) don't leave anyone out, everyone counts, and
- 4) if there is a disagreement, form a consensus.

As a class, we talk about how to form a consensus or how to negotiate a decision (could be majority rule, etc.) and how to be an effective listener. We also talk about how it's certainly okay to disagree, and how that can actually be very healthy, but it is a must that we disagree nicely!

Wills, Cornelia

cwills@mtsu.edu

Conflict Resolution:

I dedicate a specific class session to conflict resolution. The topic is intended to encourage understanding and nonviolence through conflict resolution. The class is taught using several interactive activities.

Activity #1:

I show a short clip on conflict resolution titled, "*Waterboy*". This leads into the topic for the day—Conflict Resolution. I then have students discuss how they deal with conflict. I propose different scenarios, such as conflict with an instructor, and have students provide their response through open discussion.

Activity #2:

I tell and read the story, "*The Island Story*", to the class and then poll them to see how many people vote for each character as being the most admirable. I put the results on the board, and let students discuss why they voted the way they did, and ask them to defend their answers.

This activity allows the students in class to speak out based on their value and moral systems. It is a very good icebreaker. The students are very willing to defend and even argue their own value system.

Activity #3:

I have each student do an in class assignment that is an assessment on, "*How I Act in Conflicts*". The assessment is in the form of 35 proverbs that can be thought of as descriptions of some of the different strategies for resolving conflicts. The proverbs reflect traditional wisdom for resolving conflicts. Using a likert scale, the students indicate how typical each proverb is of their actions in a conflict. Once they have completed the assessment, they total their scores.

I then review, **Conflict Styles: What Are You Like?** I then explain/review the major concerns in a conflict. Based on the five styles, I help them identify their style of resolving or managing conflict. This can be a fun exercise.

Activity #4:

Finally, I had students read a true story as it relates to tolerance and conflict resolution. I formed two different groups and had students read and answer questions as it related to the story.

The activities and assignments above are intended to promote the atmosphere of working through conflict in an effective and nonviolent manner.

Diversity:

Activity #1:

I have two students come to the front of class. Through an activity of role playing, I have the class identify ways that the two students are different and ways they are alike.

I read the diversity definitions. I ask questions and have student discussions on how many value diversity, how many have discriminated against someone. I ask how did this make them feel and how do they think it made the other person feel. I, also, ask how many have been discriminated against (along with the same questions as above). This created very stimulating and interesting conversations.

Activity #2:

With this activity, I had students look around the classroom and find someone that was different from them. I then had them take about 5 minutes to get to know that person. Afterwards, I had them tell the class what they learned. I engaged them with discussions about whether they had talked to anybody in the past that they thought was different.

Activity #3:

With this exercise, students were split into two groups. Given a list of several different categories of people, I had the students engaged in identifying the positive and negative stereotypes about each of the categories of people. Each group identified a leader. The students discussed with the class the stereotypes that were identified. This was a very engaging and fun activity.

Activity #4:

Did an exercise with the Hermann Gridd.

Activity #5:

I end the class by reading a poem on the M & M Story. The reaction of the students was that they gave an applause!