

Bridging Divided Perspectives

Conflict Resolution and Mediation from a
Multi-Disciplinary Perspective



SYLLABUS

VU Graduate Winter School

January 2025

Any general questions for the Winter School support team? Contact graduatewinterschool@vu.nl.

Course Organisation

This course is jointly organized by the VU Faculty of Law, the VU Centre for International Cooperation (CIS-VU) and the VU Conflict and Peace Studies Centre (PACS)

Course Details

Title	Bridging Divided Perspectives: Conflict Resolution and Mediation from a Multi-Disciplinary Perspective
Coordinator(s)	Marise van Amersfoort MSc – m.r.van.amersfoort@vu.nl Lenka Hora Adema LLM, MA – h.a.horaadema@vu.nl
Other lecturers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prof. Dr. Heleen Slagter, Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences, Cognitive Psychology, VU ▪ Dr. Simbarashe Maguchu, Centre for International Cooperation and Faculty of Law, VU ▪ Dr. Srdjan Sremac, Faculty of Religion and Theology, VU ▪ Lenneke Post, Faculty of Religion and Theology, VU ▪ Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wagner, Faculty of Social Sciences, Political Science, VU ▪ Dr. Nieke Elbers, Faculty of Law, VU
Study credits	2 ECTS
Form(s) of tuition	Online
Approximate contact hours	32,5 hours
Zoom link for the course	To be shared

Teaching staff (in order of appearance, click to view profiles)

- Lenka Hora Adema, LLM, MA, Faculty of Law, master Conflict Resolution, Courts and Mediation, VU
- Marise van Amersfoort MSc, Centre for International Cooperation, VU
- Prof. Dr. Heleen Slagter, Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences, Cognitive Psychology, VU
- Dr. Simbarashe Maguchu, Centre for International Cooperation and Faculty of Law, VU
- Dr. Srdjan Sremac, Faculty of Religion and Theology, VU

- Lenneke Post, Faculty of Religion and Theology, VU
- Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wagner, Faculty of Social Sciences, Political Science, VU
- Dr. Nieke Elbers, Faculty of Law, VU

Course Description

This course offers a multidisciplinary exploration of conflict and conflict resolution, equipping students with essential skills and insights to navigate and address conflicts effectively.

It delves into the conditions that encourage individuals and groups to transition from conflict to resolution. Topics include the political, cultural, and legal contexts, as well as personal motivations, meaning-making, neuropsychological processes, and external dynamics. The course investigates what motivates engagement in conflict resolution, the factors influencing the process, and the strategies to best facilitate it.

Participants will engage in practical mediation skills training, combined with theoretical perspectives from various disciplines such as law, behavioral sciences, social sciences, religion, and theology, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors promoting or hindering conflict resolution.

Learning objectives

By the end of this course, participants will:

- Understand and analyse key theories and scientific research on conflict, conflict resolution, and mediation from a multidisciplinary perspective.
- Formulate and evaluate critical questions about conflict, conflict resolution, and mediation.
- Demonstrate and critique mediators' behaviors, applying essential attitudes and skills while providing constructive feedback to peers.
- Practice and apply mediation skills and attitudes in conflict simulations, addressing real-world conflict dynamics.
- Develop and deliver effective oral and written presentations on scientific topics related to conflict, conflict resolution, and mediation from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Preparatory Assignment

To prepare for the course:

1. **Required Reading:**

Mayer, C. H. (2020). *Intercultural Mediation and Conflict Management Training*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51765-6_11

2. **Case Analysis:**

Analyze a conflict you find intriguing, preferably involving two individuals you know or have interacted with. This case will serve as a basis for practice during the course. Consider the following questions:

- **Individuals:** Who are the key players in the conflict?
- **Issues:** What are the surface-level and underlying issues? What procedural, psychological, and substantive interests are at stake?
- **Interaction:** How do the parties communicate? Identify patterns in their interactions and assess the escalation stage using Glasl's escalation model. Reflect on critical events leading to escalation. See this video about the [escalation stairs of Glasl](#)
- **Interdependence:** Analyse the parties' interdependence, power dynamics, and their Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) (see literature).
- **Implications:** What are the potential consequences for the involved parties?
- **Institutions:** What role does the context or setting play in the conflict?
- **Interventions:** What interventions have been attempted, and what could still be effective, considering the balance of power?

Note: This assignment does not need to be submitted but should be ready for in-class exercises.

Assignments

▪ **Mediation Skills Assessment (15 minutes)**

Participants will record a mediation session where they act as mediator, with two peers simulating conflicting parties. The video (recorded on Zoom using gallery view) should demonstrate:

- **Attitude:** Neutrality, balance, and trust-building.
- **Skills:** Active listening, emotional reflection, and reframing.
- **Structure:** Progression from exploration to identifying interests and moving towards resolution.
- **Deadline:** Upload to Google Classroom by **24 January 2025**

▪ **Essay or Position Paper (Max 2000 words)**

Write an individual or group essay on a chosen course topic, informed by the course's literature and additional resources.

- Select a topic from the course sessions.
- Conduct further research if needed.
- Present a clear argument or analysis in your essay.
- **Deadline: 14 February 2025**

- **Video Presentation (5 minutes)**

Create a video summarizing your essay or position paper for a general audience.

- *Deadline: 14 February 2025*

Grading

Assessment of mediation (30%)

- Attitude (20%)
- Skills (40%)
- Structure (20%)

Essay (40%)

- Assessment problem statement (20%)
- Structure (10%)
- Argumentation (40%)
- References (10%)
- Originality (20%)

Presentation of the essay in a five-minute video (10%)

- Presentation (50%)
- Content (50%)

Presence (20%)

- Active Participation (100%)

Reading list

All reading materials can be found on the Canvas site of the course.

We advise you to read this book in preparation of the course:

- Mayer, CH. (2020). Intercultural Mediation and Conflict Management Training. Springer
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51765-6_11
- Course manual (will be referred to in the morning sessions of the course)

Specific literature per day

The literature included in this list supports the guest lectures in the afternoon. We expect you to read these articles / pages in preparation of the guest lectures.

Day 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seth, Anil K. (2019) The neuroscience of reality. Reality is constructed by the brain and not two brains are alike, in Neuroscience, Scientific American, a division of Springer Nature America, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-neuroscience-of-reality/
Day 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Jacobs, Janet (2011) The Cross-Generational Transmission of Trauma: Ritual and Emotion among Survivors of the Holocaust, in Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 40 n3 (2011): 342-361, Sage ▪ Visser, Irene (2015) Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects, in Humanities vol 4 n2 (20150601): 250-265 ▪ König, Ursula and Reimann, Cordula (2018), Closing a gap in conflict transformation: Understanding collective and transgenerational trauma, Semantic Scholar, Corpus ID 162176270
Day 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes, second edition (2020), https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/20-01146_Handbook_on_Restorative_Justice_Programmes.pdf ▪ To read: Paragraphs 1.1 to 1.4, 3.2 and 8.2 to 8.4
Day 4

- Paul Gready, Simon Robins, From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Volume 8, Issue 3, November 2014, Pages 339–361, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/iju013>
- Rama Mani (2008), Dilemmas of Expanding Transitional Justice, or Forging the Nexus between Transitional Justice and Development, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Volume 2, Issue 3, December 2008, Pages 253–265

Day 5

- Zartman, I. W., & Touval, S. (2007). International Mediation. In C. A. Crocker, F. O. Hampson, & P. R. Aall (Eds.), *Leashing the Dogs of War* (pp. 437-454). United States Institute for Peace.
- Kreutz, J. (2010). How and when armed conflicts end: Introducing the UCDP Conflict Termination dataset. *Journal of Peace Research*, 47(2), 243-250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343309353108>

Course Schedule

Day	Date / time	Topic	Lecturers
1	Monday 13 January 9h30 - 13h30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome & introduction Course programme and objectives Course assignments <p>Conflict / Mediation Theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mediation: Preparation and starting phase Every conflict is the same Conflict theory and conflict diagnosis. How you look makes what you see, dealing with own judgements and working with hypothesis, neuropsychology <p>Mediation Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active listening Partialising 	Lenka Hora Adema & Marise van Amersfoort
	14.00h – 16.00h	<p>Conflict from a neuropsychological perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our brains construct our reality based on past experiences. We will discuss how this can cause biases in how we perceive, 	Prof. Dr. Heleen Slagter

		think and feel, that are mostly adaptive, but can also be maladaptive or create conflict, when perceptions between people do not align.	
	15.30h – 17.00h	Reflection / Integration	
2	Tuesday 14 January 9h30 - 12h30	<p>Conflict / Mediation Theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation: Exploration phase • Everybody wants to feel safe • Conflict Escalation • Emotion Focused Mediation • Patterns and interaction • Trauma informed practices <p>Mediation skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with emotions • Mirroring • Reflection on content, emotion, intention 	Lenka Hora Adema & Marise van Amersfoort
	14.00h – 16.00h	<p>Understanding trauma and conflict: background and theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal trauma: What is trauma. Trauma and identity, coping and resilience. How to speak about trauma. Self-care. • Trauma of the other: How to recognize and be supportive of trauma victims. Trauma 'window of tolerance'; the 'crocodile'; safety, integration and connectedness. • Collective trauma: collective and transgenerational trauma. How to speak about it; how to remember rightly in post-conflict societies/communities. Dynamics in trauma triangles. How to create trauma sensitive communities. 	Dr. Srdjan Sremac Lenneke Post
	16.00h – 17.00h	Reflection / Integration	
3	Wednesday 15 January 9h30 - 10h30	<p>Restorative Justice / Transitional Justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Restorative Justice and why is it important? How can Restorative Justice be stimulated? 	Dr. Nieke Elbers

		Restorative justice seeks to examine the harmful impact of a crime and then determines what can be done to repair that harm while holding the person who caused it accountable for his or her actions. Accountability for the offender means accepting responsibility and acting to repair the harm done.	
	10h30 - 13h00 + 14h00 – 16h00	<p>Conflict / Mediation Theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation: exploration phase II • From position to interests • The concept of the iceberg. How to explore positions and collect interests. <p>Mediation skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframing • Peeling the onion 	Lenka Hora Adema Marise van Amersfoort
	16.00h – 17.00h	Reflection / Integration	
4	Thursday 16 January 9h30 – 13h00	<p>Conflict / Mediation Theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation: Transition Phase • Mediation: Negotiation Phase • Guiding parties in making choices • Interventions to come to a result <p>Mediation skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition questions • Facilitating brainstorm • Circular questions 	
	14.00h – 16.00h	<p>Transitional Justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Transitional Justice and why is it important? How can Transitional Justice be stimulated? • Transitional Justice aims to provide recognition to victims, enhance the trust of individuals in State institutions, reinforce respect for human rights and promote the rule of law. As a step towards reconciliation and the prevention of new violations. 	Dr. Simbarashe Maguchu
	16.00h – 17.00h	Reflection / Integration	

<p>5</p>	<p>Friday 17 January 9h30 - 12h30</p>	<p>Conflict / Mediation Theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation: Completion phase • Levels of conflict resolution • You as a mediator <p>Mediation skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating the process • Self-reflection • Professional growth 	<p>Lenka Hora Adema Marise van Amersfoort</p>
	<p>14.00h – 16.00h</p>	<p>International Relations perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges to mediation and negotiation that grow in the course of conflict. The most important one is the self-logic of violence which impacts negatively on the readiness to negotiate. I will then draw on William Zartman's ripeness model according to which it requires a mutually hurting stalemate for parties to a conflict to start serious negotiations. Finally, I will introduce students to some basic findings on how wars typically end (e.g. in a negotiated settlement or with a one-sided victory or a ceasefire). 	<p>Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wagner</p>
	<p>16h00 – 17h00</p>	<p>Evaluation & closure</p>	<p>Lenka Hora Adema Marise van Amersfoort</p>
<p>tbd</p>		<p>Group meetings to prepare / record assignments</p>	

