

CONF 310-002 SYLLABUS
The Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution One-Credit Course:
Beyond Fight-or-Flight: Skills for High Stress Conflicts
September 24 – 25, 2022
9:00 am to 5:00 pm
Presented by Stephen Kotev
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INTRODUCTION

Conflict Resolvers are told to “become the calm in the midst of the storm” as we enter into situations that most would choose to avoid. These highly emotional and stressful interventions can trigger the fight-or-flight response both in the participants and in the convener. Once triggered, all the attributes we value and need the most - logic, reason, creativity and problem-solving - are all sacrificed. This course will teach you simple, practical skills focused on breath, posture, and vision that can counteract the fight-or-flight response and dramatically improve your performance under pressure.

The primary focus of this course is to develop physical skills that will enable conflict resolvers to manage more effectively the physiological stresses of conflict experienced during conflict interventions.

The aggressive and hostile behavior or profound sadness that disputants often display during conflict interventions can evoke strong emotional and physiological responses not only within the participants, but also in the Conflict Resolver. Increased heart rate, excessive or shallow breathing, constriction of blood vessels and major muscle groups, and an inability to focus are common physiological responses to stress.

These responses drastically impede the performance of the conflict resolver. If conflict resolvers are unable to manage their own emotions and stress, they will be unable to effectively perform their duties. Furthermore, conflict resolvers must be able to project and model the proper non-verbal body language necessary to instill confidence in their abilities.

Conflict resolution training is focused primarily on the development of verbal skills while neglecting the effects of stress upon the conflict resolver. Conflict Resolvers are told that they must be the ‘calm in the midst of the storm’ during these stressful encounters and are taught verbal de-escalation skills designed to manage the emotional responses of the disputants, but are not taught how to effectively manage their own stress and emotions experienced during these interventions. I believe this is a fundamental gap in conflict resolution training.

This course fills this fundamental gap in conflict resolution training by teaching conflict resolvers somatic/physical skills that will drastically improve their performance when faced with the stressful situations common during conflict interventions.

Taken from the Greek word *soma* for ‘the living body in its wholeness,’ the term *somatic* seeks to widen our definition of the body. It encourages us to look beyond our concepts of the body athletic or aesthetic into the totality of our experiences including our emotions, language, spirit, and mind. Following this line of thinking, students will experience how love and hate are observable physiological states within the body with dramatically different outlooks on violence and resolution. *A key goal for this course is to allow students to tangibly experience how different body states directly correlate to our personal willingness to enact violence or embrace peace.*

The majority of the course is based upon somatic exercises that originate in the Japanese martial art of Aikido and were created by Dr. Paul Linden. Dr. Linden received his Ph.D. from Ohio State University in Physical Education and currently holds a 6th degree black belt in Aikido. After completing his formal education, Dr. Linden studied basic human physiological reactions to stress and the fight-or-flight response using scientific methods. Applying his experience in the martial arts to his scientific observations, he developed a series of safe, effective, and easily understood physical exercises/experiments that help ordinary people cope with mental and physical stress. He has written multiple texts detailing these physical exercises including, *Embodied Peacemaking: Body Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Conflict Resolution* and *Reach Out: Body Awareness Training for Peacemaking* which will be required reading for this course.

The course will begin with a basic overview of somatic skills and how those skills can be applied to the field of conflict resolution and to improve personal performance. During the remainder of the course, students will first focus on building awareness of how their physiology responds to stress. Secondly, students will learn basic somatic techniques focused on breath, posture and vision that will be used to counteract the fight-or-flight response and maintain performance under pressure. The physical exercises/experiments created by myself and Dr. Linden will be used as a laboratory to safely experience physical and mental stress and learn how to build mastery of these basic somatic techniques.

This course will conclude with opportunities to practice these newly acquired skills in highly volatile conflict resolution simulations. These simulations allow students to gauge their capacity to perform under pressure and integrate somatic skills into their practice.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

1. Attendance and participation	40%
2. Personal Reflections Journal	15%
3. Short Final Paper	45%
	100%

1. Attendance and participation: You are expected to attend each class and fully participate in class discussion, exercises and presentations. Due to the somatic nature of the material, lack of participation greatly diminishes the effectiveness and retention of the exercises. Please notify me before the start of class if you have any recent injuries/safety

concerns or if you require any accommodations due to disability or other issues. If you are absent from portions of the course, your grade will be adjusted for those absences. Please arrive promptly for each day of the course. 40%

2. Personal Reflections Journal: This self-reflection exercise asks students to compose a journal entry that highlights how they have applied the skills learned in this course to their personal or professional lives.

Your journal entry should focus on how you applied one of the somatic techniques learned in this course during an argument or stressful situation. Use this journal entry to cultivate your self-awareness by providing specific details of how your physiology responded; how was your breathing, heart rate, amount of tension and quality of focus impacting your ability to resolve conflict? How did the somatic technique/s you used effect your performance, physical state and consciousness?

Your journal entry is due by 8 pm on Monday, October 10, 2022 and will be no less than 400 words and no more than 550 words and will be submitted via email. The file names of electronic documents must include CONF 310-002, your name and the assignment completed (e.g. CONF 310-002 - Stephen Kotev - Final Paper). Please see the 'written assignments' section of this course syllabus for additional guidance. 15%

3. Short Final Paper: A central theme throughout this course has been the idea that “Who you are is who you bring into the room.” This paper will focus on this theme and be written in two parts.

In part one of your paper discuss how you answered these questions prior to taking this course:

- Who do you bring into the room? (What type of conflict resolver/person are you?)
- What attributes do you seek to embody? (How do you conduct yourself? What do you want the participants to know about you and your values?)
- What are the physical manifestations of these attributes? (How will the participants know you embody these values/attributes? What are you doing to demonstrate these values/attributes?)

Please be as specific as possible in your description and use what you wrote on the first day of class to inform this part of the paper.

In part two of your paper, discuss what “who you are is who you bring into the room” means to you now and how the information you learned in this course has informed your perception of yourself. How have you changed since taking this course? What are you able to do now that you were unable to do before? What have you learned about yourself that you did not know before? How does this new knowledge affect your personal approaches to conflict and your work as a conflict resolver?

Your paper should be at least 750 words and should not exceed 1,000 words and are due by 8 pm on Monday, October 24, 2022. All submissions should be sent to skotev@gmu.edu in Microsoft Word document or a compatible format with files named as specified in the previous assignment. 45%

REQUIRED READING:

Linden, Paul (2003) *Reach Out: Body Awareness Training for Peacemaking*, CCMS Publications, Columbus. (Available for free download at <https://www.being-in-movement.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Reach-Out-Body-Awareness-Training-for-Peacemaking-Paul-Linden.pdf>). You are not required to print a copy of this text, but I recommend that you have a digital copy nearby.

Linden, Paul (2007) *Embodied Peacemaking: Body Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Conflict Resolution*, CCMS Publications, Columbus. (Available for download at <https://www.being-in-movement.com/product/embodied-peacemaking/>) You are not required to print a copy of this text, but I recommend that you have a digital copy nearby.

This course is experiential in nature. Please come to class in comfortable clothing since you will be moving around and participating in multiple exercises. In addition to the course reading, please bring a towel to class.

Grading Standards for the Course:

A - Superior: Student shows excellent critical analysis in oral contributions and writing; all assignments turned in on time.

B - Very Good: Solid work evidenced by careful synthesis of reading, timely contributions to class discussion, and clear, logical writing; all or most assignments turned in on time.

C - Satisfactory: Work demonstrates some understanding of materials and an average performance in written assignments and class discussion; some assignments turned in on time.

D - Inconsistent: Meager performance in all assignments and class discussion; late in turning in written work.

F - Failing: Student makes minimal effort, shows little understanding of assignments, and turns in incomplete or unacceptable work.

Grading Scale:

A+: 98-100 points	B+: 89-88 points	C+: 79-78 points	D: 69-60 points
A: 94-97 points	B: 87-84 points	C: 77-74 points	F: 59-below points
A-: 93-90 points	B-: 83-80 points	C-: 73-70 points	

Written assignments: I expect well-written and thoughtful papers that adhere to the prescribed length outlined in the assignment description. Please edit your papers carefully as spelling and grammatical errors will lower your score. Papers must be typed and double-spaced, using Times New Roman 12-point font and one-inch paper margins. Properly cite material and ideas that are not your own. If in doubt, please ask me.

Endnotes, bibliography, and title pages do not count towards the assigned paper length.

Number your pages. Title pages are not required, but you are welcome to design and format them as you please. The file names of electronic documents must include CONF 310-002, your name and the assignment completed (e.g. CONF 310-002 - Stephen Kotev - Final Paper).

Papers are due by 8:00 pm of the date assigned. Extensions will be arranged only for documented personal illness or family emergencies. Otherwise, late papers will have 5 points deducted from the final score for each day past the due date.

Re-do Option: You are entitled to re-submit one assignment for the opportunity to earn a higher grade than what you initially earned/received. If you choose to take advantage of this option, you will need to provide an accompanying letter that compares your initial submission to your second-attempt. This letter will address, the difference between the two submissions and what you learned as a result of redoing this work. Minimum length for this letter is 225 words.

CARTER SCHOOL AND MASON POLICIES AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND HONOR CODE

The professor shares and upholds the expectations of academic conduct stated by the Office for Academic Integrity. All classes are conducted in accordance with the university honor code. Although students may be encouraged to work together on some assignments and projects, each student is expected to submit their own original work. All suspected honor code violations will be reported to the honor committee for appropriate action. As student members of the George Mason University community, and as student members of this course, you are accountable to the following Honor Code:

- All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code. You can find a copy of the Honor Code at <http://oai.gmu.edu/>.
- “To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, trust, and fairness among

- all members of the Mason community, and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.”
- Should you have any questions about what it means to cheat, plagiarize, steal and/or lie, please consult the following website: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/>
 - **All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review.** With specific regards to plagiarism, three fundamental and simple principles to follow at all times include: (1) all work submitted must be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the rules for a particular assignment, ask for clarification. If you have questions regarding how to cite the contributions of others’ work in your work please speak with the professor.
 - The Carter School requires that all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit a student's work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The Carter School’s policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace or substitute for it. **Any student found violating the tenets of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review. You can find a copy of the Honor Code at <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu>**

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

George Mason University is committed to providing a safe learning, living and working environment free from discrimination. The University’s environment is meant to be experienced as vibrant and dynamic, and one that includes ample opportunities for exploration of self, identity and independence. Sexual misconduct and incidents of interpersonal violence deeply interrupt that experience, and George Mason University is committed to a campus that is free of these types of incidents in order to promote community wellbeing and student success.

- George Mason University encourages individuals who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support.
- **[University Policy 1202: Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence](#)** outlines the specifics of Mason’s process, the resources, and the options available to students. Please note that all university faculty and staff who are not Confidential Employees, and all student-employees who receive disclosures of Prohibited Sexual Conduct in their capacity as University Employees are designated as “Responsible Employees” (REs), and are

required to report, as soon as possible, all relevant details of any incident of Prohibited Sexual Conduct to Mason's Title IX Coordinator as per [University Policy 1412](#).

- Confidential Resources are available on campus at Counseling and Psychological Services: <https://caps.gmu.edu/>; Student Health Services: shs.gmu.edu; and the Student Advocacy and Support Center: <https://ssac.gmu.edu/>.
- All other members of the University community (except those noted above as “*Confidential Resources*”) are not considered confidential resources and are **required to report** incidents of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator.
- For a full list of resources, support opportunities, and reporting options, contact the University Title IX Coordinator at integrity.gmu.edu and/or at 703-993-8730. Our goal is to create awareness of the range of options available to you and provide access to resources.

ANTI-RACISM AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

As a member of the George Mason University community, the Carter School seeks to create an educational environment that is [committed to anti-racism and inclusive excellence](#). This course operates with the understanding that the work of anti-racism starts with each individual but must also be institutional; together, students and faculty in this class will work together to interrupt cycles of racism and violence, building knowledge and taking actions that cultivate a more equitable, inclusive, and just learning environment for all participants, regardless of racial background. In all our efforts, we uphold a commitment to creating honest, respectful, supportive, and healing spaces where members of our community can meaningfully dialogue and learn together and from each other for the betterment of our entire community. Learn more about the Carter School's commitment to anti-racism: <https://carterschool.gmu.edu/about/carter-school-anti-racism-statement>.

If you have concerns about something you have witnessed or experienced in the classroom or at the Carter School, or have other comments or questions, we encourage you to reach out to the Carter School co-Diversity Advisors (cchavis2@gmu.edu and sjafari@gmu.edu), or to a trusted faculty member or advisor. The university also provides the option of submitting a [Bias Incident Form](#) through Mason's Center for Culture, Equity, and Empowerment.

STUDENT RESOURCES

- **The Writing Center:** George Mason has a well-equipped Writing Center where students can access tutoring, writing workshops and helpful online resources. To find out how you can take advantage of the Writing Center, please visit their website at: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>.
- **Learning Services** provides a variety of experience-based learning opportunities through which students explore a wide range of academic concerns. To learn more about their coaching, skills, and tutoring resources, please visit their website

at: <https://learningservices.gmu.edu/>

- **University Libraries:** Visit the University Libraries website to learn more about their resources: <https://library.gmu.edu/> and for online courses: <http://library.gmu.edu/distance>
- **Office of Disability Services:** Any student who suspects s/he/they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the professor privately to discuss the student's specific needs, and provide written documentation from the Office of Disability Services (ODS). If the student is not yet registered as a student with a disability, s/he/they can contact ODS. For more information, please visit their website at: <http://ods.gmu.edu>
- **The Office of Military Services** assists veterans, active duty service members, guardsmen, reservists, and dependents in making a successful transition into the Mason community. For more information, please view their website at: <http://military.gmu.edu>
- **The Center for Culture, Equity and Empowerment (formerly ODIME)** leads the university in creating and sustaining inclusive learning environments where all members of the Mason community are welcomed, valued, and supported. Service areas include student access and equity for first generation and DACA students, student engagement for racial justice, and LGBTQ+ resources and initiatives. For more information, please visit their website at: <https://ccee.gmu.edu/>
- **Counseling and Psychological Services:** The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance. See <http://caps.gmu.edu>
- **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. See <https://registrar.gmu.edu/ferpa/schoolofficials-2/>

COVID-19 Safe Return to Campus Statement:

Students are responsible for knowing and following campus policies. Please refer to Mason's Safe Return to Campus page for updates and changes to campus COVID-19 policies. <https://www.gmu.edu/safe-return-campus>

Please notify your instructor if you are ill and will miss class, following the same process as you would for any other circumstance or illness. Note: Faculty are not expected to offer face-to-face and online delivery at the same time and due to the experiential and

highly interactive nature of this course, it is recommended that you withdraw from the course and retake it at another time if you have to miss more than an hour of class time.

RECOMMENDED READING

Blake, Amanda (2018) *Your Body is Your Brain: Leverage Your Somatic Intelligence to Find Purpose, Build Resilience, Deepen Relationships and Lead more Powerfully*, Trokay Press, New York.

Bowling, Daniel and Hoffman, David (2003) *Bringing Peace Into The Room: How the Personal Qualities of the Mediator Impact the Process of Conflict Resolution*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Crum, Thomas (1987) *The Magic of Conflict: Turning a Life of Work into a Work of Art*, Touchstone, New York.

Dobson, Terry (1978) *Aikido in Everyday Life: Giving In to Get Your Way*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley.

Ehrenreich, Barbara (1997) *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*, Metropolitan Books, New York

Emerson, Brian & Lewis, Kelly (2019) *Navigating Polarities: Using Both/And Thinking to Lead Transformation*, Paradoxical Press, Washington D.C.

Freeborn, Varg (2018) *Violence of Mind: Training and Preparation for Extreme Violence*, Self-Published.

Grossman, Dave and Christensen, Loren W. (2004) *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and Peace*, PPCT Research Publications.

Grossman, Dave (1996) *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Back Bay Books.

Menakem, Resmaa (2017) *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathways to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, Central Recovery Press, Las Vegas.

Menakem, Resmaa (2022) *The Quaking of America: An Embodied Guide to Navigating Our Nation's Upheaval and Racial Reckoning*, Central Recovery Press, Las Vegas.

Mayer, Bernard (2015) *The Conflict Paradox: Seven Dilemmas at the Core of Disputes*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Mullan, Kelly (2012) *The Art and Science of Somatics: Theory, History and Scientific Foundations*, Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS) paper 89, Skidmore College.

- Newby, Dan and Watkins, Curtis (2019) *The Field Guide to Emotions: A Practical Orientation to 150 Essential Emotions*, Self-Published.
- Porges, Stephen (2017) *The Pocket Guide to The Polyvagal Theory: The Transformative Power of Feeling Safe*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York.
- Remland, Martin (2004) *Nonverbal Communication in Everyday Life*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Rhodes, Richard (1999) *Why They Kill: Discoveries of a Maverick Criminologist*, Random House, New York.
- Sapolsky, Robert M. (1994) *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*, Henry Holt & Company, New York.
- Saotome, Mitsugi (1993) *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature*, Shambhala Publications, Boston.
- Sheridan, Sam (2010) *The Fighter's Mind: Inside the Mental Game*, Grove Press, New York.
- Van der Kolk, Bessel A. (2014) *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Viking Penguin, New York.
- Waitzkin, Josh (2007) *The Art of Learning*, Free Press, New York.
- Wise, Jeff (2009) *Extreme Fear*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Young, Shinzen (2016) *The Science of Enlightenment: How Meditation Works*, Sounds True, Boulder, CO.
- Yunkaporta, Tyson (2020) *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*, HarperOne, New York

Somatic Skills for Conflict Resolvers Agenda

Day One

9:00 Introductions and Orientation

- So who are you?
 - What values or attributes do you bring with you into the room?
 - What are the physical manifestations of these attributes/values?
- What are Somatic skills and how can we go beyond our Fight or Flight response?
- Why do we need these skills?
- How does the incorporation of these skills affect our performance in high-conflict situations?

Break/Questions and Answers

Introduction to Somatic Exercises and Techniques

- Throwing Tissues – Page 6 - Reaching Out
- Soft Tongue/Relaxing Your Belly – Page 8 - Reaching Out
- Belly Breathing – Page 10 - Reaching Out
- Throwing Tissues II – Page 12 - Reaching Out
- Autonomic breathing – Variation from Lt. Col. Dave Grossman
- Circular breathing – Variation from Ellis Amdur
- Six Directions Reaching/Breathing – Page 37 - Reaching Out

Break/Questions and Answers

Continuation of Somatic Exercises:

- Don't Stand So Close To Me
- The Power of Words & Paraphrasing Practice from Hatred/Love
- Pain Control – Page 39 - Reaching Out

4:45 Adjourn and Review of Homework

Day Two

9:00 Review of Previous Material

Somatic Exercises Continued:

- Hatred/Love Postural Structure Test
- Hatred/Smiling Heart – Page 16 &17 - Reaching Out

Break/Questions and Answers

- Pattern Ball Icebreaker
- Inguinal Sitting – Page 23 - Reaching Out
 - Pelvic Rotation - Page 20 - Reaching Out
 - Chest Push – Page 24 - Reaching Out
 - Towel Sitting – Page 33 - Reaching Out

Break/Questions and Answers

- Role Play

Break/Questions and Answers

- Role Play 2
- Walking The Gamut (everyone will complete this exercise twice) – Page 29 - Reaching Out

4:45 Wrap Up/Final Questions and Answers/Evaluations