OVERVIEW:
This Distance Learning course seeks graduate students to explore the role of communication in organizational conflict management. Students will assess conflict scenes, design correction regimens for those scenes, and present their solutions in a face-to-face seminar on the last day of class. Students enrolled in the Certificate of Communication Studies Program will observe, record, describe and analyze conflict episodes in their own work contexts using qualitative analysis methods: open-ended observations, field notes, participator observations, in-depth/open-ended interviews, semi structured interviews, ethnographic surveys, archival data and ethnographic sampling. Finally, students will write formal solutions to these contextual conflicts and make a formal presentation of the same before the assembled class.

NEED:
Conflict invades and pervades communication exchanges in the commercial and professional organizational contexts. Managers, supervisors, planners seem baffled by the bristling intents of clients and servers as conflict grows to its ignoble cousin, violence. Undocumented conflict episodes corrode mutuality in common service exchanges, and erode the productivity of those who serve. Conflict’s effects are plain to see in commercial settings. Not plain, however are the roots of this conflict springing from dysfunctional communication patterns. By documenting and analyzing these troublesome episodes, students may clarify the need for functional communication practices in organizations, and may create viable solutions for their disruptions in their own vocations.

METHOD:
The course first, will introduce students to four communication theorists who provide systematic means of understanding both the perceived problem and the visible evidence of conflict. Next, students will be given qualitative analytic tools to examine conflict. Then students will be invited to submit examples of conflict corroding and eroding channels of communication in their own organizations. Once the case studies are analyzed, then students will be propose techniques for solving the organizational conflict patterns in their contexts. The students as a class will display their solutions for other members of the class to see on the Web page provided by the instructor of the course. Finally, students will present their solutions in a seminar-like face-to-face class. A “jury” of professional managers will hear these solutions and offer critiques from their organizational experience.

GOALS:
+ To introduce students to theoretical models for understanding organizational conflict.
+ To introduce students to qualitative techniques for recording, describing and analyzing conflict episodes.
+ To introduce students to methods for solving communication conflict scenes.
+ To provide students with opportunities to display their problem-solving techniques to class peers and community leaders.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
+ Students will be able to differentiate between personal conflict and social conflict in case studies and within their own organizations.
+ Students will be able to write descriptive case studies of real conflict situations using the ethnographic techniques provided in the course.
+ Students will create a “working document” prescribing methods for solving conflict problems in their own organizations.
+ Students will present their written solutions at the end of the course for public critique.
COURSE OUTLINE:

#1 Overview of course goals
  Topic: Nonverbal communication in conflict: Judee Burgoon
  Assignment: Apply theory construct to individual conflict problem

#2 Kenneth Burke’s Dramatism:
  Topic: Gender differences in conflict
  Assignment: Apply theory construct to individual conflict problem

#3 Stuart Sigman’s Speech Functions
  Topic: Cultural differences in conflict
  Assignment: Apply theory construct to individual conflict problem

#4 Margaret McLaughlin and Richard Buttmy’s Accounts
  Topic: Dangerous workers
  Assignment: Apply theory construct to individual conflict problem

#5 B. Aubrey Fisher’s Indicators of Conflict Resolution
  Topic: Air rage
  Assignment: Apply theory construct to individual conflict problem

#6 Morton Deutsch (analysis)
  Topic: Security issues
  Assignment: Apply theory construct to individual conflict problem

#7 Morton Deutsch (solution grid)
  Topic: Common speech patterns inviting conflict
  Assignment: Apply theory construct to individual conflict problem

#8 Topic: Formal and informal status and conflict
  Assignment: Part one-Conflict Analysis: Description of the scene

#9 Topic: Reducing conflict at new employee orientations
  Assignment: Part two-Conflict Analysis: Description of major actors

#10 Topic: Fast food & Restaurants
  Assignment: Part three-Conflict Analysis: Isolation of salient variables in conflict

#11 Topic: Car dealers and repairs
  Assignment: Part four-Conflict Analysis: Communication analysis of the variables

#12 Topic: Malls and shopping centers
  Assignment: Part five-Conflict Analysis: Communication variables to correct problem

#13 Topic: gas stations
  Assignment: Part four-Conflict Analysis: Solution for reducing conflict

#14 Publication of the final projects on the Web

#15 Public presentations of solutions in seminar format