Cuba and the Transformative Process of Globalization: A Field-Based Course on Conflict Resolution and Social Capital

David Reilly, Ph.D.
Department of Political Science
Niagara University
dreilly@niagara.edu

Paper prepared for the 2014 ISA-FLACSO International Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This is a draft; please do not cite without permission.

INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL CAPITAL, GLOBALIZATION, AND CUBA

As prospects improve for the opening of Cuba to a globalized world, the country serves as a fascinating and informative case study with which to examine economic, social, and political development. This paper presents a model for developing a faculty-led field-based intensive research course for classroom- and field-based experiential learning. The course centers on two interrelated aspects to the transformation of Cuba: the role of social capital in new economic and political development, and the process of dispute resolution that facilitates cooperative change. Social capital is a crucial element of civil society, which is in turn a requirement of modern democracy; at the same time, it is also important as a basis for economic activity. Dispute resolution will become increasingly important as social dynamics are modified by globalization. It is also necessary for addressing many of the outstanding disagreements and escalations that have resulted in a protracted conflict with the United States. This course is intended to analyze and research Cuban policies as they transform to
shape new structures and formal institutions. This paper outlines the course, describes the research objectives, and identifies specific student learning objectives. It also details the field-based research that will take place in Cuba, and how study within the country will facilitate the learning process.

Courses involving Cuban foreign relations or history typically—and rightfully—include the following discussion points: the Cuban Revolution, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the influence of Soviet ideology and policies, anti-imperialism and US assimilation strategies, emigration from Cuba and expatriot communities in the United States, the causes and effects of US trade embargoes (especially the Helms-Burton Act) against Cuba, evolving US policy toward Cuba, and Cuban policy toward the US. Because of geopolitical location and strategic interactions that have occurred as a result, much of recent Cuban history is inextricably linked to the United States. And one of the most notable characteristics of US-Cuban interactions is the imbalance of power between these countries. As a result, Cuban resistance to US policies—and the consequences of this resistance—has largely defined the country from a social, political, and economic standpoint.

Since 1989, when the Soviet Union ended its economic assistance programs, Cuba has had little choice but to participate in the global economy. Its economic interactions have been limited and gradual, primarily involving tourism and foreign investment, but the effects have been substantial and important. Globalization is a process of interactions that increasingly occur over borders. It is facilitated by the removal of barriers, restrictions, and impediments to the interactions. Put differently, the more similar a country is to its globalized partners (or potential partners), the more likely it is to engage in these interactions. If those interactions involve profit, flows of valuable information, or resources demanded by the public, it becomes increasingly difficult to resist this process of homogenization.

As globalization takes hold, a potential unintended consequence is the erosion of traditional social, political, and economic systems both within and across states. Globalization begins with
advancements to communication and transportation technologies, which extend across borders and generate new public demands. Individuals are deprived, and recognize this deprivation because of the information they have received through globalization’s exchanges. They want more, and force their governments to respond. Leaders are then left with the choice of repressing demands, or using legitimate or illegitimate means to satisfy the demands of their populations. International trade is the most likely outcome, which in turn fuels greater market efficiency, innovations in technology, and restarts the cycle of interdependence.

Accordingly, the Cuban government’s decision to invite foreign investment and to promote tourism has opened up the door to increased exchanges. One immediate effect of this evolving policy change is the growth of new networks of relationships among the Cuban population. This is the essence of social capital—the assumption that the fostering of social networks and the evolution of cooperation between individuals and groups both within and across societies positively affects the productivity of those people. Governments often provide preferential treatment to, and facilitate cooperation between, individuals and groups in order to manage and foster the networks and outcomes they want to develop. And, according to Hearn, the Cuban government has sought a:

“broad, increasingly public, expansion of local initiative and social capital in Cuba since the early 1990s. Particularly in the country’s more economically dynamic zones the state has attempted to harness and assimilate this emerging human resource into official structures of governance, both to facilitate neighborhood development projects and to bridge a growing rift between official institutions and unregistered community actors. This policy orientation has evolved in the context of the withdrawal of economic support from the Soviet Union after 1989 and the evaporation of trade with former Eastern Bloc countries, precipitating a 75 percent reduction in Cuba’s import capacity and a host of apocalyptic predictions about the fate of the Castro government” (2-3).

Social capital is what Alexis de Tocqueville has called the “art of association.” Fukuyama describes it as “the instantiation of norms that permit people to cooperate in groups.” The concept was
popularized by Robert Putnam in his works, Making Democracy Work, on differences between the north and south of Italy, and Bowling Alone, which addresses community-building in the United States. Social capital is a crucial element of civil society, which is in turn a requirement of modern democracy; at the same time, it is also important as the basis for economic activity. That said, the term is contested among social scientists for its imprecision and because it equates economic concepts with moral and social relationships.

A concern of policy analysts is how to manipulate social capital at the macro level. Because social capital is perceived by some to be established through a lengthy process of cultural evolution, there is a debate about how best to foster it. Structures and formal institutions can be shaped through policies, and accordingly some view the manipulation of institutional development as the best means of influencing social capital.

There are consequences to these types of policy changes, especially when the initiatives diverge substantially from past practices. Cuba had rejected the imperialist system perpetuated by the United States, and rejected the capitalism on which the global economy is based. As a result of economic necessity, however, Cuban officials have engaged in an arduous and painful reversal toward globalization: “struggling to keep its economy afloat, the Cuban government asked its anxious citizens for renewed austerity, self-sacrifice, and understanding… The trauma of relinking with the global economy during the past decade can only be compared in scale and magnitude to the profound strain of delinking from it in the 1960s” (Hearn 2008, 4). This does not necessarily mean a rejection of past ideological orientations, but instead an updating of economic strategies to adapt these ideologies to a changing world. As Starr observes, “Cuba is trying to carry out a ‘gradual but relentless’ updating of socialism driven by economic and political necessity as well as the country’s unique realities” (Starr 2013, 2).
In conjunction with this economic reorientation, there has been an effort in Cuba to promote the development of civil society. The process of engaging individuals and groups in social networks has been theorized to result in greater support for collective policies, reduced crime and delinquency, and more democratic processes (See, for example, Cardoso et al 2004, 7-10; Putnam 1993, 2000). As described by Hearn, “initiatives pursuing these goals have stressed the strategic importance of associational life at the grassroots and the value of ‘social capital’ as a cost effective, renewable resource that can help disadvantaged communities to generate new opportunities and help societies to become more tolerant, egalitarian, and prosperous” (Hearn 2008, 4).

Such a process is a difficult one in Cuba, where political and economic freedom has been defined in very narrow terms historically. As Hearn argues, in Cuba the “...efficacy and meaning of civil and economic liberties are qualitatively different from that assumed in most studies of social capital and civil society. In Cuba these differences stem not only from the intended omnipresence of the central state but also from the rapid adaptation of the state to the pressures and opportunities of a liberalizing global market. Structures of representation and authority in such cases are not only shaped by the character of the economic and political context, but also by its constant transformation and evolution” (5). Put differently, globalization generates what Barber (1995) describes as “imperatives” that necessitate the transformation of social structures, elevate certain individuals and groups in both economic and political terms relative to others, and minimize the ability of government to moderate economic change through policies.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Cuban officials have a difficult process to undertake. At best, globalization offers the prospect of peace, prosperity, social benefits, and international cooperation. At worst, it facilitates a systemic
imperialism that Cuba has resisted for half a century. Even if the best of benefits is received, it comes at the cost of government giving up its ability to manage its own economy—which is why Friedman described globalization as a “golden straightjacket” (1999). Managing the transformation of social, political, and economic structures involves anticipating disputes, resolving conflicts, and promoting a cooperative path to the future.

In this regard, Cuba is a fascinating case for studying conflict resolution. It has already begun a process of change. Starr offers this account in her report to the *Pacific Council on International Policy*:

For someone who has been to Cuba several times in the past 18 months, change is evident. With each visit, there are more private businesses, more renovated homes and apartments, more traffic (especially taxis) on the streets of Havana, more foreign tourists, and more 1950s-era cars on the road, as the new opportunity to sell cars mixes with tourist demand for rides in the old cars now operating as taxis... And with each visit, Cubans are less and less apprehensive that the current opening to private enterprise will be aggressively rolled back later on, as has happened in each previous reform effort” (Starr 2013, 1-2).

Transformation will lead to tension; this can be studied to better understand how conflict resolution strategies can best be applied.

Conflict resolution training has increasingly become a cross-cultural endeavor (Honeyman and Cheldelin, 2002). This has included practical, hands-on approaches to training in foreign places (see, for example, Loode, 2011; Marlin-Bennett, 2002). Given that individuals learn in different ways, hybrid approaches to teaching conflict management and alternative dispute resolution make sense. In addition, scholars may be able to contribute to conflict resolution through their participation in the process (Kelman 2000).

This paper presents one model for developing such a course: a faculty-led field-based intensive research course that includes classroom work and field-based experiential learning. Students are introduced to community development theory, conflict theory, principles of Alternative Dispute
Resolution (ADR) strategies (such as negotiation, arbitration, adjudication, conciliation, and mediation), and the application of these concepts to Cuba as it evolves with the international economy.

WHY FIELD-BASED LEARNING?

The learning experience from a field-based course can be richer than one that takes place solely in a classroom. Fowler suggests that “in the twenty-first century, [active learning] pedagogy may be particularly appropriate for those teaching international relations in a complex global system” (2005, p. 156). He suggests that participatory learning, or engaging the students in a foreign environment, offers more advantages than disadvantages. Although there are many linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as resource requirements to make a foreign classroom productive, the advantages of active learning techniques applied abroad are numerous: “If an appropriate learning environment is carefully nurtured... active learning can prove to be an exceptional way to boost professional development, while bridging cultural differences and helping in some small way to build peaceful global relations” (p. 172).

Active learning approaches can develop problem solving skills that traditional learning environments and activities do not stimulate. Research has demonstrated that students have different preferences for learning and they approach material in different ways (Fox and Ronkowski 1997). By varying course content and approaching it in novel ways, different students can be motivated and stimulated to participate and learn. Analytical and critical thinking skills are developed by integrating coursework into real-world experiences and offer participants opportunities to engage the material and participate in active learning.

One of the better known and respected models for understanding teaching and learning processes is the Kolb Experiential Learning model (Kolb 1988, 1984). Within, learning is disaggregated
into four distinct but related stages. These stages are complementary and the most effective learning processes integrate each. *Concrete experience* refers to observing events and relationships through engagement and personal involvement. *Reflective observation* follows concrete experience, and involves processing and analyzing direct experiences. *Abstract conceptualization* is the process by which the student develops generalized models that integrate ideas of how experiences are interrelated. From these models a student generates expectations and predictions of how the world should work. *Active experimentation* involves testing these expectations in light of real world experience. The process of learning is cyclical in the sense that real world experiences, which confirm or refute the predictions addressed in active experimentation, are examples of concrete experience—the first stage of learning. Reflection follows new empirical evidence, and abstract concepts and theories are revised on the basis of additional information. With these revisions, testing is conducted anew.

Hybrid courses that integrate field-based experience with classroom work have the potential to encapsulate each of the four stages within Kolb’s model. The active learning stages of concrete experience and active experimentation can be stimulated through role-playing and experiencing events as they unfold in the real world. Readings assigned in conjunction with these activities can aid the student in the process of abstract conceptualization. Debriefing sessions and discussions during or after field-based experiences can contribute to reflective observation and a student’s processing of the information they receive from the experience.

A second benefit of engaging the students in this manner is that the experience can create for students a sense of purchase in the materials and topics. Students often feel disconnected from international relations. For students who have never seen the ocean it can be difficult to get excited about maritime law and its importance for the evolution of international cooperation. For students who have never left the United States it is hard to picture how territorial disputes evolve from feuding
neighbors to interstate war. For students who are too young to remember the Cold War, bipolar and multipolar systems are merely concepts. Furthermore, theories of international relations are often abstract to the point of seeming irrelevant. Readings about alliance building, systemic anarchy, and relative power, for example, rarely enable students to grasp the intricacies of the strategies that evolved from theories of power politics.

Experiencing events, meeting key actors, and visiting key sites will lead students to apply abstract coursework to their real-world experiences. They will consider how decisions are made, what factors influence these decisions, and the trade-offs that are weighed in the process. As a result, students will ultimately think about foreign policy from a new perspective. The more concrete the experience, the more likely the student is able to imagine the circumstances that shape decision-making.

A third benefit of field-based coursework is that participants develop skills that they may not otherwise develop in the classroom setting. The field-based coursework requires that participants communicate verbally and present their position to others, ask questions, and reflect on what they have seen and experienced.

An additional benefit is that field-based coursework can be enjoyable. Travel can be fun. Of course, the students should be well-prepared to meet the challenges associated with travel, including cultural awareness and sensitivity. This is another benefit, in that students develop life skills through the experience. Further, a field-based course offers an opportunity for instructors to break up the tedium of a traditional class. This is not to say that classes should be oriented toward entertainment first and education second, but that if there is an opportunity to overlap the two, and if there are benefits that result from making the education entertaining, then it makes sense to do so.
Cuba serves as a useful case study because it embodies a complex and long-standing international dispute. It has taken a hardline stance of anti-imperialism, which has been responded to with equal or greater fervor, for more than fifty years. Personalities are a crucial aspect of the escalating conflict—Perez’s “Fear and Loathing of Fidel Castro: Sources of US Policy Toward Cuba” (2002) documents much of the individual-level animosity that has advanced tensions—but they are only one dimension. Attempts to mediate have failed. Both side have entrenched (see Leogrande’s “Enemies Evermore: US Policy Towards Cuba After Helms-Burton,” 1997) and continue to advance dispute-driven rhetoric. The US embargo has had real and far-reaching effects on the well-being of individuals in both countries. And cultural differences are paramount to this conflict as well. Changes to the status quo have the potential to shift the balance of this long-standing conflict and shape future relations. As Hearn observes, “Official anxieties about excessive local autonomy in Cuba are evident... These concerns are driven in part by the stated intentions of U.S. foreign policy. Together with the 1996 Helms-Burton Act (which was drafted in order to strengthen the U.S. trade embargo by punishing foreign corporations that trade with Cuba), the Cuban Democracy Act, or ‘Track II’ legislation, remains committed to ‘reaching around’ the Cuban government to support organizations that could eventually destabilize it” (Hearn 2008, 13).

Although it is widely recognized that culture has the potential to be a divisive phenomenon, it can be a difficult concept for students to grasp. The definitions of nationalism are varied and distinct (see, for example, Hutchinson and Smith 1995). Cohen (2001) describes the difficulty in educating students about alterity, or the awareness of others who hold distinct but equally valid world views, but at the same time highlights that this is a crucial lesson for students to learn. Given that international relations often are characterized by cross-cultural dissonance and miscommunication, an understanding of perspectives across cultures can be fundamental to comprehending world events.
The complexity of Cuba’s history provides an opportunity for students to examine the nexus of domestic and international politics, and how conflict on one level affect the prospects of peace on another. Dynamics of the Cold War, imperialism and post-colonial legacies all factor into how Cubans view themselves. Its geopolitical position has had tremendous historical importance. The colonial legacies persist into modern day and the culture is uniquely diverse because of these influences.

Through the history of the conflict, students are able to gain an appreciation for how disparate perspectives emerge. The Cuban anti-imperialist position can be juxtaposed with the US promotion of democracy and regional security positions to demonstrate how views become entrenched, reinforced, and intractable.

COURSE COMPONENTS

There are a number of innovative elements that enhance the value of this course. As described above, active learning is recognized as an effective approach to encourage reflective learning that is based in real-world settings. This course takes place over a two-semester sequence, which allows the student to acquire critical knowledge, skills, and theoretical understanding that informs the field-based research. The first semester of this course enables the student to develop an understanding of the circumstances in Cuba, to examine theories of social capital and conflict resolution, and to draw links between theory and circumstances in Cuba. Over a four month period that includes approximately 15 meetings, students are taught through a mixture of lectures, group discussions, and video conferencing sessions. During the second semester the student participates in intensive field-based research in Cuba for a two-week period. They observe and document events and activities, and reflect on how this real-world experience reconciles with their in-class work and the theory they have studied. And, because
this is a faculty-led program, this process is facilitated throughout with an instructor who leads the trip and moderates discussions that take place during the field-based research.

The primary objectives of the course are to enable students to explain the major theories of conflict resolution; write research papers that demonstrate proficiency in explaining the concepts inherent in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR); conduct research (collect and analyze data) that demonstrates an understanding of the theories of conflict resolution as they relate to international politics generally and Cuba specifically; and explain how countries differ in their political orientation, and offer an explanation for why and how these variations occur.

More broadly, the objective is to enable students to apply the concepts of conflict resolution to the real-world example of Cuba. Through this process students should be able to research, analyze, and report on potential and current issues of conflict in Cuba. Through the experience students gain an awareness of other countries and cultures, and the distinctiveness that characterizes the world community.

*Training and Research*

In the classroom, students are introduced to the process of conflict resolution with the foundational perspective that conflict occurs along cognitive (perception), emotional (feeling), and behavioral (action) dimensions (Mayer 2000). These dimensions apply to social systems as well as individuals, and we explore the manner in which each is evident in Cuba. Culture, power, and information set the context for conflict and conflict resolution; with that in mind we assess the extent to which communication is shaped by culture, historical context, and power relations among key actors.
Successful resolution requires changing perceptions, feelings, and action. Following Mayer’s (2000) framing of dispute resolution, students examine how dispute resolution can be approached, and the critiques that accompany these orientations:

- Belief 1: dispute resolution is about helping people reach agreements to end their conflicts
  - Critique 1: focusing on agreements, outcomes, or solutions is also an agenda

- Belief 2: dispute resolution has a great potential to encourage personal transformation, and such transformation is often essential if conflicts are to be effectively addressed
  - Critique 2: transformation often does occur as a result of experiences people have with conflict and its resolution, but usually not through a direct effort to make transformation happen

- Belief 3: dispute resolution cannot be conducted fairly without addressing power imbalances and the issues of social justice
  - Critique 3: if dispute resolvers are expected to take on the task of eliminating structural inequalities in society, not only will they be ineffective in dealing with conflicts but they also will be unable to add much to movements for social justice

- Belief 4: the goal of resolvers ought to be deeper analysis and understanding rather than negotiated agreements
  - Critique 4: this approach embodies an unrealistic view of the way progress occurs in resolving serious conflicts
Belief 5: disputes are resolved when key interests are addressed

- Critique 5: most serious conflicts are based on a deeper level of needs than is captured through an exploration of interests

Through subsequent research, students are required to reflect back on these approaches and to comment on their applicability to conflict resolution in Cuba.

In assessing the effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies, students investigate key indicators of success and failure. Using Weitzman and Weitzman’s model (2000), they consider the extent to which parties work together in the processes of decision-making and problem-solving. They examine each stage of the process: diagnosing the conflict, developing and identifying alternative solutions to the problems, evaluating and choosing a mutually acceptable solution, and committing to the decision and implementing it. Students are asked to consider various outcomes—compromise, agreeing to a fair procedure for determining the winner, integrative solutions—and whether some aspect of circumstances in Cuba can involve such an outcome. With regard to integrative solutions, those in which all parties’ needs are considered and met, students research the plausibility of achieving these through expanding the pie, nonspecific compensation, logrolling, and bridging (Weitzman and Weitzman, 2000).

To anticipate a mutually acceptable solution for aspects of social and political change in Cuba, students are asked to consider the extent to which the psychological climate matters: whether perceptions of cohesion, fairness, recognition of success, and openness to innovation facilitate problem solving and persuasion strategies over bargaining and politicking. They research strategies and techniques that are conducive to cultivating a concern for the other’s interests as well as outcomes that help to promote problem solving.
DO CUBAN-US RELATIONS REPRESENT AN INTRACTABLE CONFLICT?

Following Coleman’s (2000) characterization that the conflict is stuck at a high level of intensity and destructiveness because the issues are deeply important to people and remain unresolved for long periods of time. Intractable conflict, according to Coleman, is characterized by:

- **Time and intensity**: persistent, cyclical outbreaks with sporadic increases in intensity
- **Issue centrality**: needs or values at stake perceived to be essential for survival
- **Conflict pervasiveness**: affects day-to-day existence
- **Hopelessness**: inability to envision any approach to resolving the conflict other than that of continued use of force aimed at annihilating the other
- **Motivation to harm**: primary objective is to harm the other
- **Resistance to resolution**: traditional approaches often fail to bring about conflict de-escalation or resolution

Students research the extent to which each characterization fits the experience of Cuban-US relations, and how the conflict escalated to this level. They consider the importance of irreconcilable moral differences such as religious or personal values; high-stakes distributional conflicts over finite or scarce resources; “pecking-order” conflicts involving struggles over relational power, ranking, and political dominance; the extent to which resources affect identity; and the complex web of latent and manifest issues that define the conflict (Coleman, 2000).

We review the consequences of intractable conflict such as economic costs, violence, intergenerational perpetuation, divisions, and effects on mental health.
Coleman also provides a series of lessons and guidelines for intervenors in conflict, which students assess and critique as they relate to Cuba:

1. Conduct a thorough analysis of the conflict system (history, context, issues, dynamics) prior to intervention

2. Initial concern for the intervenors should be to establish or foster an authentic experience of “ripeness” (authentic commitment by the parties to change the direction of the normative social processes of the relations towards de-escalation) among disputants or among key representatives of each of the groups involved in an intractable conflict. Accomplished by:
   a. Threats and the use of physical force
   b. Perception of a hurting stalemate (suffering losses in a conflict that cannot be won)
   c. Experience of a recent or near catastrophe
   d. Awareness of an impending catastrophe or deteriorating position

3. Initially, orient disputants toward the primary objective of defining a fair, constructive process of conflict engagement, and away from the objective of achieving outcomes that resolve the conflict

4. Given the complexity of intractable conflict, analysis and intervention must be embedded in a multidisciplinary framework

5. Elicitive approaches to conflict intervention, particularly when working across cultures, tend to be more respectful of disputants, more empowering and sustainable, and generally more effective than prescriptive approaches
6. Short-term (crisis-management) interventions need to be coordinated and mindful of long-term objectives and interventions

7. When working with conflicts between large groups (such as ethnic groups and communities), it is useful to concentrate interventions on “midlevel” leadership representing each group

8. The general intervention strategy must integrate appropriate approaches for issues rooted in the past, the present, and the future

Course Assignments

Course requirements include four research and reflection papers, and a research presentation. The first paper addresses broad theories of conflict resolution. The second connects these theories to globalization, social capital, and Cuba via the analysis of specific events. The third provides the student with an opportunity to examine a conflict area in detail, or to examine a specific event or group in Cuba. The fourth requires that the student reflect on their trip to Cuba (the meetings, discussions, observations, events) and relates these experiences to their research conducted prior to the trip.

After the first paper, students are also required to present their research findings to the class. The presentations emphasize the central themes from the readings such as the authors’ main arguments and conclusions, as well as the authors’ supportive evidence; key events, individuals, locations; disputed aspects of the topic; lacunae in the literature; and the presenters’ arguments, opinions, and critiques.

Following the semester in the classroom, students are prepared to conduct their field-based research. There is a strong emphasis on concurrent and post-hoc reflection during the field-based research. This approach is intended to enable the student to engage in all phases of the learning
process. In the classroom, they generate an abstract conceptualization of circumstances in Cuba and how alternative dispute resolution techniques are relevant. They gain concrete experience by observing events in Cuba. Their reflective observations allow them to process and analyze their experiences, and through active experimentation they revise their understanding of conflict resolution processes and how they work in the real world. Each of these phases is documented by the student through their course assignments.

Throughout the trip, students will have the opportunity to meet with government officials from Cuba, the US, and from various non-governmental organizations. They also attend lectures by professors from Cuba who are experts on Cuban history and diplomacy.

The intent of these meetings is to allow students to observe multiple approaches to conflict resolution. They are able to assess governmental- and community-based strategies, and to see how specific policies are implemented. Students also observe the effects of spoiling (see, for example, Newman and Richmond 2006) and can see first-hand the challenges to peace-building. Through meetings with community groups and government officials they learn that many groups—including rebels, insurgents, diasporas, governments—may work to undermine long term cooperation, and that poorly conceived dispute resolution can result in new forms of spoiling that undercut future cooperative efforts.

Students maintain field journals during their two weeks of research. Each day begins with a briefing by the faculty leader, who provides an overview of what students may encounter. The students are encouraged to reflect on what lessons, readings, theories, and concepts will be relevant for that particular day, and how the frameworks they have learned may apply. The framing of student learning is crucial for a field-based experiential course. It is important to “ground” each daily session through a discussion of course concepts and how they may be evident in the day’s itinerary. And, at the end of
each day it is also valuable to hold a debriefing session that involves a restatement of key themes, lessons, and gives students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and to provide feedback on the lessons. Students are required to document each day’s reflections and to answer specific questions related to the first semester’s course content.

The debriefing ensures that the learning experience from the field-based course is richer than one that takes place solely in a classroom. By engaging the students in a foreign environment, participatory learning is enhanced. And any linguistic and cultural barriers that were experienced throughout the day are discussed, analyzed, and interpreted. Through the process the student can conceptualize conflict resolution and apply theory to real-world experience and practice.

**CONCLUSION**

Students are increasingly crossing borders to become trained in conflict resolution. In a field where the practical application of theory is central to the education process, it makes sense that students be exposed to real-world attempts at alternative dispute resolution. This paper presents one model for such a course: a faculty-led field-based experiential learning course. With a combination of classroom work and field-based research, students are introduced to conflict resolution, peacemaking, community building, and dispute management. By experiencing first-hand transformations taking place in Cuba, students learn about community development theory, conflict theory, principles of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) strategies, and the application of these concepts.

Research has demonstrated that field-based courses can enhance the learning that takes place in the classroom. Conflict resolution education should develop problem solving abilities—skills that traditional learning environments and activities do not stimulate. By coupling classroom work with field-
based research, hybrid courses such as the one described above can foster each of the four stages described by Kolb’s model of learning. Experiencing events and interacting with decision-makers can create for students a sense of purchase in the materials and topics, and lead them to apply abstract coursework to their real-world experiences.

Students learn that successful conflict resolution requires changing perceptions, feelings, and action. By conducting field-based research in Cuba, they observe how incremental and problematic these changes can be. Whether this education is intended to produce practitioners or individuals more knowledgeable about dispute management, learning experiences such as the one described in this article help students to investigate the key indicators of success and failure in conflict resolution strategies.

The effects of social change—as evidenced through the emergence and development of new forms of social capital—are also important to examine. It is difficult to separate the elements of social capital and globalization from the evolving disputes that affect Cuba. Hearn describes the connection in the following manner:

The Cuban civic landscape reflects a more subdued—though no more predictable—process of socioeconomic transformation led by a government undergoing something of an identity crisis as the forces of economic globalization render the function and legitimacy of a centralized political system uncertain. Alternative informal systems of prestige, hierarchy, and economic exchange have expanded, but the state’s response, informed by events in Eastern Europe, has been to officially recognize the social influence of these emerging systems and attempt to engage them rather than force them underground. This has ceded political space to interest groups willing and able to work within the state’s administrative structures...” (Hearn, 2008, 9).

While tensions are inevitable, Hearn envisions that these changes can be productive for society and government alike. For citizens, he argues that “The gradual emergence of a wide variety of grassroots organizations in the Cuban context suggests an alternative, potentially more egalitarian process of social development... “the political gravity of grassroots initiatives in contemporary Cuba has
endowed them with a greater capacity to engage with the state on their own terms” (11). With regard to the government, he portends that “Recent Cuban reforms designed to attract foreign investment and facilitate decentralized social welfare will likely strengthen rather than weaken the legitimacy of the Cuban state because, unlike in Eastern Europe, they have promoted the stable coexistence of the state and nonstate sectors rather than pitting them against each other” (14).

Although the field-based component of this course is relatively brief (two weeks on the Island), students can gain much from the research if their concurrent and post-hoc reflections are guided and reinforced. Admittedly, a longer research period would be preferable for a student to truly appreciate the breadth and depth of the effects of globalization on Cuba, the effects of social capital, and the nature of Cuban-US relations. However, practically speaking, few students can afford to commit the time and resources required to engaged in longer-term research and field-based study. The quality of the learning experience is enhanced by providing, in advance, the frameworks for students to process their observations from the field. Because this course allows the students to learn about conflict resolution first, then apply those concepts to circumstances in Cuba, and finally to experience Cuban society first-hand in order to ground their abstract conceptualization of the situation, they can gain more from the condensed, concentrated experience. And, through this learning process, students are better prepared to apply the theories and concepts of conflict resolution to the real world.
References


Rice, Condoleezza. “Rethinking the National Interest: American Realism for a New World,” *Foreign Affairs* 2008, 87(4), 2-14, 16-26


