Peace—just what is this, in the world as it is and in the world as it ought to be? We study the social complexities and dynamics of peace (theory and practice) and nonviolent social action. We look at concrete cases in different parts of the world. The stories and ideas of practitioners in the struggle for justice and peace are vital for our discussions. Three books, required texts for the course, form the core of our seminar approach. Be committed to doing the assigned reading ahead of each week of our class sessions. The Voice of Hope, Aung San Suu Kyi, by Alan Clements, gives a powerful example of nonviolent action for democracy and just peace in Burma (Myanmar). Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential, by Gene Sharp, helps us examine key aspects and challenges of nonviolent struggles across the globe. One aspect we focus special attention upon is social power. To better understand movements and ideas of peace we study selections from David Cortright's Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas. Two other books would make excellent recommended readings, though they are not required: Nonviolent Social Movements: A Geographical Perspective, by Stephen Zunes, Lester Kurtz, and Sarah Beth Asher, provides poignant accounts of peace and justice efforts in various continents; Women Building Peace: What They Do, Why It Matters, by Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, is a rich trove of inspiration and analytical research on the role of women and their transformative leadership in regard to the United Nations and international NGOs.

We shall explore some of the ways that sociology—in collaboration with other fields—can shed light on the relationships between peace and other social dimensions such as social justice, human rights, democracy, and security. Our course draws on the sociological imagination. We use our sociological imaginations to engage personal biography and public history in an incremental discovery of the social significance of peace as both idea and movement. We examine the social power (and limitations) of strategic nonviolent action. The great Russian writer, Tolstoy (War and Peace), would remind us of something we know all too well in the world today: that peace, sadly, is not the whole story, and so a “companion” course, sociology of war, is taught in the spring term.

Peace has both inner and outer quality. A great book to help you make connections between inner peace and international peace is Thich Nhat Hanh’s Creating True Peace: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community, and the World. This is a guide for practicing peace via meditation/contemplation, social analysis, and social action.

Some other recommended reads (other sources include websites such as the Social Science Research Council, the Center for Global Nonkilling, the Nonviolent Peace Force, the Global Peace Index, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the Albert Einstein Institute, Veterans for Peace, the American Sociological Association section on peace, war, and social conflict, and the United States Institute of Peace):


The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology, ed. by Kate Nash and Alan Scott (Blackwell Publishing, 2004)

Peace and Conflict Studies, by David Barash and Charles Webel (Sage, 2009)

Issues in Peace and Conflict Studies, Selections from CQ Researcher (Sage, 2011)

Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace, by Vandana Shiva

Schedule of Readings and Themes, Week by Week (Please be sure to read the assigned readings ahead of our sessions each week):

Week One – Tuesday, January 10 and Thursday, January 12 Introduction to themes and round of personal introductions (with focus on persons who have been major inspirations for us in our quest for peace and justice); Nobel Peace Prize recipients, Right Livelihood Award recipients (first round of research, assignment for Thursday of this first week).


Week Six – Tuesday, February 14 and Thursday, February 16 Aung San Suu Kyi and the Sociological Imagination (read pages 165 – 222, The Voice of Hope); Sociology of Nonviolence (read pages 359 – 421, Waging Nonviolent Struggle)
Week Seven — Tuesday, February 21 and Thursday, February 23  Gandhi, King, Democracy, and Justice (read pages 183 – 278, Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas); Social Power and Social Strategy (read pages 423 – 552, Waging Nonviolent Struggle).

Week Eight – Tuesday, February 28 and Thursday, March 1  Idealism, Realism, and the Responsibility to Protect (read pages 279 – 339, Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas). Study diverse questions in preparation for the final exam (see below).

Week Nine – Tuesday, March 6 and Thursday, March 8  Team Presentations

Week Ten – Tuesday, March 13 and Thursday, March 15  Team Presentations

Final Exam – Thursday, March 22, 10:15 AM – 12:05 PM

Course grade will be based on four elements, each worth 25%:

1. Regular class attendance and active participation (i.e. read the assigned texts before class sessions and be prepared for discussion).
2. Five-page paper, due on February 23 at beginning of class; see guidelines below
3. Team presentations, which take place during the last two weeks of class; teams will be formed and guidelines will be provided during our fifth week of class.
4. Final exam; this will be an open book exam and will take place on March 22 as indicated above.

We will schedule individual meetings (15 minutes each) early in the term. I want to meet with each of you for a brief conversation to learn about your keen interests as they may relate to our course. For later in the term, my office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2 – 3 PM. Please meet me at the “Fresh Juices” Energy Bar, corner of SW Park and Clay.

Sociology of Peace, Five-Page Paper  This paper is due on Feb. 23 at the beginning of class (please submit hard copy in person, thank you so much).

Guidelines:

1. Length: Five pages, double-spaced, typed, with 12 point font and 1 inch margins; please indent at the beginning of each paragraph.
2. Focus of the paper: Write an essay expressing: a) your understanding of the world as it is, b) your vision of the world as it ought to be, and c) your recommended approach for moving the world from “the world as it is” in the direction of “the world as it ought to be”.
3. In doing so, as you prepare to develop this essay: a) think constructively and critically about your assumptions regarding peace, justice, power, idealism, and realism, b) ask yourself how accurate and complete—and how limited and distorted—may be your current perception of the world as it is, c) consider the sources of your vision of the world as it ought to be, and d) examine the merits and limits of your recommended approach for changing the world. In this paper you are invited to share your own outlook on the matter, but to do so with a keen
sociological imagination and an awareness of the diverse influences that have helped to shape your worldview.

4. Think critically and constructively as you prepare to develop this paper. Think about the sociological aspects of the question. How do the social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological conditions of our own life experience influence the way that we approach this writing project?

5. Consider various methods you might use to help develop your ideas: e.g. stories, experiences, empirical evidence, comparisons and contrasts, metaphors; be creative with your powers of language.

6. The three course texts can serve as reference sources; also draw from two to three other sources which you shall discover through your own research. (I will refer you to several good websites for potential leads.)

7. Use a standard citation guide (e.g. APA or MLA) for citing your sources.

8. Be clear and concise.

9. You will want to develop a couple of drafts as you aim toward that final edition. Edit, edit, and edit again.

10. Be sure that your polished paper (five pages, with page six as your references page) includes a clear introduction (which will be where you present your thesis and tell the reader how you are going to develop your argument), a strong body (where you develop the argument), and a well-grounded conclusion (where you summarize your key points and tell the reader why the now-developed argument provides reasonable support for the central claims of your thesis).

Some Study Questions for Our Sociology of Peace Final Exam (which is open book):

1. Drawing from the ideas and experience of this course—and from your own life experience—develop a brief reflection on the meaning of peace.

2. Discuss what Aung San Suu Kyi has in mind when she speaks of a revolution of the spirit.

3. Reflect on Aung San Suu Kyi’s response to this question: “What is it in life that provides you with the greatest sense of meaning and purpose?”

4. Cortright states: “Nonviolent action is the key to more realistic pacifism, a bridge between idealism and realism.” (19) Explain why this statement perhaps gets to the core of his thesis in the book.

5. Discuss how Aung San Suu Kyi answers the question of choosing between an armed struggle for democracy and a nonviolent struggle for democracy.

6. What are the basic premises of Gene Sharp’s whole approach to waging nonviolent struggle?

7. Focus on any two of the many nonviolent struggles which are documented in Waging Nonviolent Struggle. How do these two cases illustrate key points in Sharp’s social view of power?

8. Cortright writes: “More effective and humane strategies are needed for addressing the critical challenges of social evil. Too often in the past pacifists have decried the horror of war but have not faced frankly the problem of resisting social evil.” (125) Have you begun to take up the challenge of thinking about more effective strategies? What insights from the course (especially from the three books) can you draw upon to develop more effective strategies for resisting social evil or social domination and oppression/aggression?
9. What have we learned from Thich Nhat Hanh?
10. Discuss the drama of people power in Egypt in the light of Gene Sharp’s chapter 34, “The Redistribution of Power” (423-430) and other relevant points in Waging Nonviolent Struggle.
11. From a close reading of Cortright’s book, what have you learned about the meaning and practice of peace in relation to religion? (See especially chapter 9)
12. Discuss the three most significant insights about peace that you have gained from a careful reading of The Voice of Hope.
13. Discuss the three most significant insights about peace that you have gained from a careful reading of Waging Nonviolent Struggle.
14. Discuss the three most significant insights about peace that you have gained from a careful reading of Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas.
15. Cortright’s chapter 10 (“A force more powerful”) perhaps best gathers together many of the threads of our course. How so?
16. Discuss Gandhi’s satyagraha and the significance of this approach for both self-transformation and societal transformation.
17. Come up with a question which you believe best gets to the heart of what you have learned in this course; then answer it😊.