COURSE PROPOSAL

from
John N. Warfield
to
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A course in
SOCIAL SYSTEM DESIGN

as part of
the GMU
Conflict Resolution Program
SUMMARY

It is proposed to offer in the spring of 1987 a course titled SOCIAL SYSTEM DESIGN at the graduate level. This course would carry 3 or 4 credits. It would have both lectures and practice in a problem-solving laboratory environment.

The course would be taught by Dr. John N. Warfield, University Professor, with assistance from others. Included as assistants would be Dr. Alexander Christakis, Dr. David Keever, Dr. Ben Broome, and possibly others to be nominated from the Conflict Resolution Program at GMU.

This course would be a revised version of a graduate course previously offered at two other institutions (the University of Virginia and the University of Northern Iowa) by Dr. Warfield.

The objective of the course is to prepare graduate students for leadership positions in complex problem-solving, including problems arising out of conflict situations.

The preparation will include presentation of theory, methodology, and case examples in the lectures; and problem-solving sessions in the laboratory. The laboratory facilities will be provided by the Center for Interactive Management (CIM).

If this course proves to be very successful, an ultimate outcome in future years might be to develop a laboratory like that in CIM which would become dedicated to use only in the George Mason University Conflict Resolution Program.

It is anticipated that two other initiatives will accompany this course offering, as follows:

- Some limited formal activity to familiarize the Conflict Resolution Program staff with the resources and practices of CIM

- At least one joint research proposal involving CIM and the Conflict Resolution Program, that draws on the experience and expertise of CIM, and which could include partners from one or more other universities
COURSE DETAILS

1. **Title and Number of Credit Hours.**
   SO{}CAL SYSTEM DESIGN 3 or 4 credit hours

2. **Semester and Year for Planned Offering.**
   Spring, 1987, for initial offering.
   Thereafter what happens will depend on the results of this offering.

3. **Course Description.**

   Organizations as social systems, forms of organizations
   (groups, teams, task forces, committees, corporations,
   bureaucracies), behavior of people in groups, organizational
   adaptation versus organizational design.

   A language of problem-solving, with emphasis upon design,
   including discrete mathematics, graphics, processes,
   and physical settings.

   Isolating the factors that may inhibit effective problem-
   solving: inadequate theory and methodology (the "science"
   factor, inadequate physical facilities for group problem-
   solving (the "context" factor), lack of actor capability
   (the "creativity" factor), poor processes for group work
   (the "process" factor), inadequate resources such as
   information, local support for documenting group work,
   economic resources to implement solutions, etc. (the
   "resources" factor), and conflict among the actors
   (the "conflict" factor).

   The balanced approach that assigns relative saliency to
   the six factors, and strives to reduce the inhibition to
   the essential "core of conflict", while understanding that
   there may not be any such core.

   Design laws and practices, design philosophy and rationale.
   Design of organizations, short-life and long-life, in the
   light of political considerations.

   Issue-specific designs, laboratory sessions, and term paper.
This class will meet for a 3-hour lecture or laboratory session each week during the term. If there are one or more lecture-free weeks, the laboratory sessions will meet twice during such weeks, for 3 hours each.

Prerequisites: Consent of Instructor, membership in the Conflict Resolution graduate program.

4. Objectives.

- To sensitize the student to human perspectives on social system design, through development of models of social systems of various types, and analysis of human roles and values in these systems

- To clarify organizational influence upon individual behavior, and to identify those factors that inhibit effective problem solving in most of today's organizations

- To develop student capability to design social systems with emphasis on such factors as mission, roles, activities, events, matching actors to roles, and matching resources to problem situations

- To illustrate in practice the means of eliminating all inhibiting factors in problem-solving other than the "core of conflict", through design of the problem-solving processes, contexts, and social system

5. Syllabus

See attached sheet.
SOCIAL SYSTEM DESIGN
SYLLABUS

1. Organizations as Social Systems.
   - The definition of social system
   - Forms of organizations
   - Behavior of people in groups
   - Organizational change
   - Bureaucracies

2. The Nature of Complex Problems
   - Substantive complexity
   - Structural complexity
   - Process complexity
   - Escalation in group problem-solving
   - Factors that inhibit progress (see Figure 1 attached)

3. The Language of Social System Design.
   - Mathematics
   - Graphics
   - Processes and Settings

4. The Fundamentals of Generic Design
   - From systems science
   - From behavioral science
   - From experience

5. The Theory of Generic Design
   - Laws
   - Principles
   - Methods
   - Relation to Scientific Thought

6. The Methodology of Generic Design
   - How to make a topic generic
   - How to assess scope of applicability
   - Methods of idea generation, structuring, clarifying, presenting, interpreting, and validating

7. Applications to Organizational Design
   - Case Studies
   - Practice
SIX FACTORS THAT MAY INHIBIT OR PREVENT PROBLEM SOLVING OR ISSUE RESOLUTION

Figure 1
6. Method of Grading

Homework  25%
Mid-Term  25%
Examination

Term Paper
* Presentation  25%
* Manuscript  25%

7. Reading List

A. Books on Reserve