The Conflict Management and Resolution Program: From Theory to Practice

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Faculty of the Humanities and Social Sciences
The Program

Conflict is a part of life in society, within families, in communities, in the political and global arenas. The unique program at Ben-Gurion University in the Negev was developed specifically to train and equip superior students and professionals to study conflicts and find ways to resolve them. The program was founded by Professor Dan Bar-On, and later led by Professor Shpalle Shgei. Since its establishment, the program has grown, flourished and attracted many students, and is taught simultaneously in Beersheva and Eilat campuses. Faculty members in the program have published dozens of articles in prestigious journals and have received thousands of research grants in this field.

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Conflicts are an inseparable aspect of life in society, in organizations, families, communities, the political sphere and in the international arena. The unique Conflict Management and Resolution Program at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev was developed specifically in order to train outstanding students, researchers and professionals to understand conflicts and find ways of managing and resolving them. The Program was conceived of by the late Prof. Dan Bar-On and directed at first by Prof. Shifra Sagy. Since its establishment, the Program has grown and flourished, attracting a range of students. It is now taught both at the main Beer-Sheva campus and in Eilat. The Program’s faculty members have published extensively in prestigious journals and won dozens of research grants.
The program operates within a multidisciplinary framework and covers a wide range of academic disciplines, allowing students to understand conflicts from different perspectives and disciplines. This facilitates the presentation of integrated approaches to research and conflict resolution, in addition to acquiring practical skills, theoretical and in-depth research. The practical experience is an integral part of the academic program and includes active participation in community projects and negotiation processes. The program promotes engagement in diverse communities, including the Negev in particular. In addition to academic excellence, the program is offered as a bachelor's degree, and in the second and doctoral degrees.

The courses deal with conflicts at different levels: between individuals, groups, organizations, and international conflicts. The program examines the phenomenon of violence in various ways, including violence within families and methods to prevent violence, peace and reconciliation education, critical thinking in conflict resolution, and topics such as religion and state.
The multidisciplinary Program includes lecturers from varied fields, providing students with multiple perspectives for understanding conflicts. The Program enables the integration of various approaches in the study of conflicts and the means of managing and resolving them, and combines in-depth theoretical and analytical studies with the acquisition of practical skills. Practical experience is an integral part of the curriculum and includes active participation in community projects and mediation processes, forging agreements and negotiations. The Program encourages involvement with Israel’s various communities, particularly in the Negev. The Program offers a BA module, as well as MA and PhD degrees.

Courses deal with conflicts at different levels: between individuals, groups, organizations, ethnicities and nation-states. The Program also deals with various aspects and manifestations of violence, from domestic violence to violence prevention, education for peace and reconciliation, literature in a divided society, critical thinking in conflict resolution, and issues of religion and state.
Field Trips

The project’s field trips aim to enrich and provide additional information on the issues and topics addressed in the study. The trips enable students to exit the professional language familiar to them and learn a new communication language. The personal experience makes the study of the subject meaningful and enables the transfer of tools for practical use.

The project manager, Fevzi Abraham,

"In the project, we aim to build a unified language for everyone, so that students "exit" the familiar professional language, learn a new language, and listen to and learn from each other. This personal experience turns the study of the subject meaningful and enables the transfer of tools for practical use."

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Field trips are an integral part of the program, intended to augment the knowledge gained from classroom discussions with hands on experience of various conflicts up close and provide a broad perspective on contemporary conflicts in Israel and around the world. Field trips include: a tour focused on border issues; an introduction to the Bedouin sector and its challenges and developments; a tour of the Haredi community in Israel; a tour dealing with the complexity of environmental issues in the age of globalization and development, especially in the context of the center-periphery; tours dealing with refugee and migration issues, conflicts in the city of Beer-Sheva and the Negev and more. Additionally, the best researchers in the field of conflict research in Israel and abroad present at the Program’s forum meetings. Both lectures and tours emphasize an open and critical discussion.

“In order to forge a uniform language of discourse for everyone, students must “step away” from their familiar professional language, get to know the others and listen to them and learn a new language for dialogue. This personal experience makes studying in the program highly significant and provides much more than broadened horizons and applicable tools.”

Ifat Avraham, Program Coordinator
We believe that theory cannot provide a similar understanding in the context of the program, which provides practical experience (practicum) in societies and different social institutions, including activist organizations, or communal organizations working to prevent violence and social issues. The practical experience aims to familiarize students with the ways in which theoretical frameworks can be translated into practice in the social field, and at the same time, it enables practical learning, in which students can examine the application of theories and perspectives they have learned, and expand their understanding of different conflicts. Students accompany their practical experience with research.

What is new in the program?

In the context of the practical experience (practicum), we opened a new program, which allows practical experience in resolving family conflicts in different ways to legal procedures, promoting dialogue processes, building agreements and mediation, taking into account psychological and legal aspects in the process. In the community aspect, the goal is to increase dialogue in resolving family conflicts and help couples, who have economic or other problems, receive significant services individually. Students/teachers undergo supervised processes of negotiation, dialogue, mediation, and writing a marital agreement, as well as family counseling processes.

The head of the practical experience program for resolving family conflicts is lawyer mediator Merav Moran Goren.
We believe that theory cannot supply the level of understanding that is provided by practice and field experience. The master’s program in Conflict Management and Resolution therefore includes a practicum; practical work experience in social organizations and various public institutions, including organizations focused on activism and social change, and community organizations working on violence prevention and with at-risk youth. The purpose of the practicum is to expose students to the ways in which theoretical frameworks can be translated into practice in the field, while at the same time enabling practical learning where students can test the application of theories and perspectives acquired during their studies and broaden their understanding of various conflicts. The students’ practicum is accompanied by research.

New in the Program

Within the practicum framework, we launched a Family Conflict Management and Resolution Practice that provides practical experience in resolving family disputes in alternative ways to legal proceedings, while promoting dialogue, consensus building and mediation in addressing the psychological and legal aspects of the process. From a community perspective, the goal is to increase dialogue in resolving domestic conflicts and to provide couples experiencing financial and other difficulties with meaningful, confidential service. The students are guided through practical experience in the processes of intake, dialogue, mediation and the drafting of agreements between partners, as well as in preliminary family counseling processes. The Family Conflict Management and Resolution Practice is coordinated by advocate and mediator Merav Meiron-Goren.
Program Faculty

**Prof. Orna Braun-Lewensohn**

PhD in psychology and education. Primarily interested in the emotional and psychological implications of coping with stress and conflict, focusing on individual and community resources for coping among different cultural and ethnic groups in Israel and abroad.

[http://ornabl.wix.com/ornabraunlewensohn](http://ornabl.wix.com/ornabraunlewensohn)

**Prof. Sarah Abu-Kaf**

PhD in clinical psychology. Specializes in cross-cultural psychology and various sources of stress, resources and strategies for coping, ways of conflict management, and their associations to different distress paths among people from different cultural backgrounds.

[http://aks412.wix.com/a-ksarah](http://aks412.wix.com/a-ksarah)
Prof. Ayelet Harel

PhD in political science. Her research is located at the intersections of political science, critical theories of security studies and studies of conflict and gender. Research interests include politics, society and law in India and minority rights. She is also conducting extensive research on feminist theory in security studies, and an analysis of narratives of male and female soldiers.

http://ayeleths.wixite.com/home

http://ayeleths.wixite.com/home
Dr. Shoshana Steinberg

PhD in social psychology. Has taught in the program from its inception. She studies relationships between groups in conflict, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the characteristics of discourse in encounters between Jews and Arabs, elements that hinder and promote dialogue, narratives, and the boycott movement against Israel.

Dr. Tal Litvak Hirsch

A clinical psychologist and PhD in social psychology. Studies the ramifications of terrorism on women and families; peace education; identity and perception of the other in Israeli society; and implications of the Holocaust on Israeli society, especially in the third generation. She also teaches a workshop on body-mind and mindfulness.

http://litvakhi.wixsite.com/tall
The teaching faculty is composed of leading academics and outstanding field practitioners, enriching students’ knowledge through theory and practice. For example, Dr. Shulamit Fisher-Einziger, an organizational consultant and expert on conflict within organizations; Dr. Yamit Elfassi, director of “City without Violence” and an expert in the prevention of violence, Mr. Omri Gefen and Mr. Jonatan Naftali, experts on mediation and building consensus, Dr. Yaron Salman, who specializes in the study of ethnic conflicts, as well as many other exceptional lecturers.
Ittai Trifman, BA graduate

“In the Program I discovered that academia can be different—relevant, personal and enriching. Today I find myself using interpersonal techniques that I acquired in my studies. The Program doesn’t sound trivial because it’s not. When the tools provided are combined with a teaching staff that aspires to create a significant experience for the students, it is self-evident.”

Sagi Kaplan, Master’s degree graduate

“The Conflict Management and Resolution Program is multidisciplinary, and its students arrive from a wide variety of fields. This multidisciplinary encounter expands and enriches course discussions and enhances the learning experience... I knew that, at any given moment, any one of the instructors would gladly sit down and discuss any topic, enlighten me, clarify any problems and propel me forward towards graduation.”
Liat Richman, BA graduate

“The Program is a home, treatment is personal, discussions are intimate and the professors enable each and every student to express their opinions with dignity. In the context of such a big institution the Program is like a warm embrace.”

Nirit Portughies, PhD graduate

“After completing my master’s in the Program, it was clear to me that I would also do my doctorate there. The Program fit me like a glove because of my everyday involvement in various conflicts across the Negev. The combination of theoretical knowledge, research and practical experience is invaluable in dealing with real situations on the ground. Beyond that, the Program is a home! There is no substitute for the support, guidance, professionalism and the amazing human embrace I was privileged to receive!”
For further information about the program and how to register: ifat@bgu.ac.il

For the Program website:
http://in.bgu.ac.il/humsos/conflict/Pages/FirstGood.aspx