



## **The World-Wide-Web A Tool for Building Citizen Diplomacy Skills**

**Guy Burgess, Ph.D. and Heidi Burgess Ph.D.**

Co-Directors

Conflict Research Consortium

Campus Box 327, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO80303-0327

Phone: 303-492-1635; Fax: 303-492-2154;

E-Mail: [burgess@colorado.edu](mailto:burgess@colorado.edu)

Copyright 1997 by Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess.

Do not reproduce without permission.

Perhaps the most important feature of the telecommunications revolution and the Internet is its ability to dramatically reduce the cost while simultaneously increasing the speed at which information can be distributed. In our work we have experienced roughly a thousand-fold decrease in information dissemination costs with a comparable increase in speed. It is hard to underestimate the qualitative importance of quantitative changes of this magnitude. While high-speed communication has long been available to top-rung government and business officials, the broad extension of these capabilities to other segments of society is extraordinary. The question, which this conference addresses, is how can these capabilities be best used to advance the cause of peace and justice. Clearly, there are a great many exciting opportunities to be pursued. This paper describes the work that we are doing to pursue one such opportunity thanks to a grant from the United States Institute of Peace. Work is now underway with the program to be phased in between now and December 1, 1997. Our system can be accessed at: <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict>.

Broadly, our goal is to use the Internet to "put a better handle" on the knowledge base of the peace making and conflict resolution fields. We want to make it much easier for people at the grassroots level get the information about conflict resolution and peace building that they need when they need it. Our work is based upon the following assumptions:

### **Unconventional "Grassroots": Diplomats Play a Crucial Role**

Relationships (and conflicts) between peoples and countries are, in large part, determined by the actions of large numbers of people from all sectors of society who work at the grassroots level. The vast majority of these individuals do not consider themselves to be diplomats in the traditional sense of the word. However, many of them engage (intentionally, or at times, unintentionally) in what is called citizen diplomacy--the efforts of ordinary people (not official diplomats) to moderate their conflicts with other ordinary people who represent opposition groups. Such citizen diplomats include, for example, religious leaders, mediators, members of advocacy groups, political groups, humanitarian relief

organizations, non-governmental peacemaking teams, commercial interests, academics, students, and even tourists. These are the people to whom the Internet is giving extraordinary new capabilities.

#### Too Many People Have to "Reinvent the Wheel"

Relatively few of these citizen diplomats have received significant formal training in diplomacy or conflict resolution. As such, they are often unaware of the many proven strategies that allow them to avoid destructive conflict dynamics, while still advancing their interests in conflictual situations. Because of this lack of knowledge, these individuals are often forced to go through the painful process of "reinventing the wheel." In many cases they fail to find solutions before serious escalation or violence occurs. To limit these problems, we clearly need better ways of disseminating the knowledge base of the diplomacy, peace research, and conflict resolution fields.

#### Dissemination Opportunities are Limited

People involved in citizen diplomacy and conflict resolution are generally operating under tight resource constraints and even tighter time constraints. For many dealing with conflict is a part-time, do-it-yourself job that has to compete with other equally important responsibilities. As a result, people have only the most limited opportunities to learn new and better ways of dealing with conflict. Any effective skills dissemination program must be precisely focused to quickly give them the information that they need, while avoiding distracting information overload.

#### One-Size-Fits-All Solutions Are Unworkable

Conflict processes are complex and highly variable with each situation presenting unique challenges in which each party has only limited opportunities to improve the situation. Different approaches are, therefore, needed for adversaries and intermediaries, for tractable and intractable conflicts, for differing cultural orientations, for the various substantive issues, and for differing power contexts. Persons involved in conflict can't be expected to know how to deal with *all* situations. The goal needs to be to teach them how to better deal with their *specific* situation.

#### Training and Educational Resources are Limited

The ability to disseminate the field's knowledge base is also limited by the number of training programs available. While training opportunities are growing rapidly, there are still not enough affordable programs to train all citizen diplomats who might benefit from such training. There are also difficult and important issues of quality. Many currently available programs fail to present state-of-the-art techniques or offer insights that are not adequately tailored to the needs of individual students. In short, the field is now able to train only a small fraction of the people who could benefit from the field's rapidly-growing knowledge.

#### STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING DISSEMINATION LIMITS

Overcoming these dissemination limits will require either 1) substantial increases in the field's overall funding level, or 2) significant increases in the efficiency of dissemination programs. Here we believe that the most promising, currently available approach involves exploiting the Internet's ability to more efficiently provide large numbers of people with information that is:

-

- virtually free (for those with access to the net),
- instantly available,
- easy to access,
- largely complete (full-text executive summaries mean that users don't need to consult other information sources),
- customized to the specific needs of individual users, and
- sensitive to user differences in languages and culture.

In addition to spreading information on general, face-to-face strategies for dealing with conflict, the Internet can also be used to share how-to information on various virtual diplomacy techniques.

#### MULTI-DIMENSIONAL INTERNET-BASED DISTANCE LEARNING

The core of our program is a multi-dimensional Internet-based, distance learning program. The program combines the telecommunications power of the Internet, the time-tested principles of correspondence (or distance) learning, and a sensitivity to cross-cultural communication and translation problems. Our approach occupies a useful middle ground between interactive, face-to-face training and the simple option of reading a book or article on a subject of interest.

The foundation of any educational process is the desire of students to learn. People interested in a topic will pursue, within the limits of available time and resources, whatever opportunities are available. While some can arrange to travel abroad to study or bring teachers in from other countries, most cannot. While they may be able to obtain copies of one or two key books in the field, such self-guided reading is limited by difficulties in identifying and obtaining copies of appropriate works. Individual study also fails to draw the reader into a wider community of people with similar interests.

Our project is designed to provide a low-cost solution to these problems. First, it will provide the user with easier access to the field's key concepts along with a custom-tailored reading program suggesting profitable routes for further study. The project also provides participants with connections to the larger community of people who are interested in the field. (Scenarios describing how we expect that the system will be used are included at the end of this article.)

The basic training program, with its on-line modules, assignments, and exercises is roughly equivalent in scope to a three-hour, upper-division university course. By using the course's optional, additional reference materials, exercises, and assignments, the scope of the program can be expanded considerably beyond this basic level. This allows us to provide far more information than is available in a

standard 40 hour, one-week training program. For those who lack the time to take the full course, the program also includes a more tightly focused interface, which quickly guides users to suggestions for dealing with their specific problems. More specifically, the program consists of the following:

#### Customizable Core Course Modules

The core training program consists of a series of six basic units. Each unit contains an overview section and a number of more specialized sub-sections describing common problems and potential solutions. Also included is a customization module that allows the computer to tailor the program to individual user needs. There are two principal versions of the materials: one for people who approach conflict from the perspective of first-party adversaries and a second for those more interested in a third-party, intermediary perspective. A number of different examples illustrate how each key point could be applied in different settings. For example, different illustrations of the escalation process are used in modules oriented toward labor-management disputes, political conflicts, or military confrontations.

These materials are provided online in easily understandable and translatable English. Also included are citations for more detailed supplementary resource materials (see next section). Exercises and role plays are included in the belief that many small groups will elect to take the course together. Online exercises are also planned.

#### Supplementary Resource Materials

The course provides an extensive, annotated listing of recommended resource materials. These include: 1) original sources for many of the ideas presented in the course modules, 2) more detailed information on specific topics, and 3) references to publications in other languages. Full bibliographic citations are included, allowing the user to obtain the materials directly from the publishers. The Consortium also plans to act as a "one-stop" clearinghouse through which these materials can be ordered. New materials will be added as they are identified by Consortium research projects or suggested by participants. This aspect of the program supplements the on-line modules; it also complements conventional training programs by providing a reference library service for those who want to follow up on conventional training programs that they may have taken.

#### Instruction, Evaluation, and Certification

Formal university credit for the basic three-hour college course is available through the University of Colorado's Division of Continuing Education at standard University tuition rates. Certificates of Completion are available from the Consortium at lower cost. Since we recognize that this may be prohibitively expensive for many potential users, we will also seek funding for "scholarships" to reduce or eliminate these costs. Participants receive feedback from course instructors through an exchange of e-mail messages and written assignments.

Basic instruction is handled by a team selected by the project directors for their knowledge of conflict resolution processes. Instructors are recruited via the Internet from different parts of the U.S. and from advanced graduate students at the University of Colorado. The course is also structured so that it may be used on a free, "do-it-yourself" basis without benefit of on-line instruction.

#### On-line Seminar

An on-line seminar will also be conducted in conjunction with the University, for credit, class. The seminar will focus upon a series of recent news stories describing current conflict problems. Our goal is a thoughtful on-line discussion in which participants are asked to suggest the most constructive ways of dealing with particular conflicts. Participants are also asked to critique and then help develop suggestions made by others. Specific topics will vary from time to time so that we can always focus upon issues which are prominent in the news and of widespread interest.

#### Interactive Feedback Loop

The knowledge base is not a stock of ideas which emerges from academia and is then disseminated throughout the world. It grows, rather, from an interactive process in which practitioners are continually trying, evaluating, and revising the ways in which they approach conflict. For this reason we have built a feedback loop into our Internet-based information management system. We actively solicit comments and ideas from system users through questionnaires and case study descriptions. Their responses will then be added to a user information component of the system.

#### User Support

The Consortium administers an on-line discussion group through which participants could exchange information both about the course and about conflict in general. Program materials also include modules describing ways in which users can, once they have learned how to use the system, help make it available to others within their communities. Boulder-based training in the use of the system is also available to foreign visitors who can then return to their countries and serve as local liaisons for the project.

#### Easy Access Guides

Also available is a guide describing how to access the system in different parts of the world. These guides describe options ranging from high-end, state-of-the-art computer systems to creative uses of older, low-cost technologies. This effort builds off the accomplishments of both the Internet and the Association for Progressive Communications, the international affiliate of PeaceNet and ConflictNet, which has made impressive progress in extending the benefits of computer networking to poorer regions of the world.

#### COURSE-BASED INTERFACE

The course is organized following the model of intractable conflict that we use in our training programs for foreign visitors and in our graduate seminars. We go beyond a discussion of ways of negotiating mutually acceptable, win-win solutions to tractable conflicts and consider more constructive ways of dealing with deeply-rooted, intractable conflicts: those that have an irreducible win-lose element.

We help the parties diagnose specific conflict-related problems and then identify moderating strategies designed for implementation by either intermediaries or the parties themselves. Some of these strategies can be used unilaterally, while others require the cooperation of contending parties or the intervention of intermediaries. While we discuss the role alternative dispute resolution (ADR) strategies can play, we also discuss conflict approaches (such as non-violent action) that rely upon coercive power and force. The course raises important and difficult issues about the difference between legitimate and illegitimate sources of power. Course modules are offered in the following sequence:

## Conflict Assessment and Mapping

Conflict is a complex process involving 1) people in widely varying roles, 2) different issues and sub-issues, 3) a continuing series of dispute episodes within the context of the long-term, underlying conflict, 4) numerous complex interactions, and 5) legal, political, military, economic, religious, and other institutions. Our goal is to give students the common vocabulary needed to discuss alternative approaches to conflict. We then use this vocabulary to show users how to map the key features of typical conflicts.

## Control of Overlying Conflict Problems

In our teaching we distinguish between core issues at the root of a conflict and a series of overlying problems which exacerbate the conflict and obscure the core issues. This course segment explores possible solutions to overlay problems in the following areas:

- 
- **Interest Clarification and Position Development:** forming positions which truly advance the underlying interests of the parties;
- **Constructive Framing:** understanding and adjusting for the fact that people in different positions see a conflict differently;
- **Limiting Misunderstanding:** identifying and correcting perception and communication failures;
- **Assuring Procedural Fairness:** understanding why conflicts intensify when people regard the resolution process as unfair, and how to avoid such problems;
- **Fact Finding:** identifying what aspects of a conflict are amenable to resolution through commonly accepted fact-finding procedures;
- **Controlling Escalation and Polarization:** illuminating how the cycle of provocation and counter-provocation can intensify a conflict and transform substantive discussions of difficult issues into hostility and violence motivated by fear and desire for vengeance. Strategies for blocking and reversing these destructive processes are also considered.

## Negotiation Opportunities and Limits

This segment first discusses how and why negotiation and mediation facilitate the pursuit of options for mutual gain: win-win solutions. It then shows how to identify conflicts which are less amenable to negotiation because of their zero-sum (win-lose) character. We explain how, in such cases, alternatives

to a negotiated agreement may reduce negotiation potential or delay the time when a dispute is "ripe" for resolution.

### Power Alternatives To Negotiated Agreements

Although alternative dispute resolution (ADR) has often been sold as an alternative to power-based dispute resolution, it is often unable to deliver on that promise. Rather, negotiation and ADR must operate within the context of ongoing power struggles. If one or more parties thinks they can achieve a better outcome through force, they will use that approach, not negotiation. In examining power contests, the course concentrates upon non-violent alternatives to military force and confrontation, building on the traditions of Gandhi and King. The goal is to help users develop less violent power options for pursuing justice.

### Legitimizing Power

The use of power to advance principles which are broadly regarded as legitimate tends to reduce the backlash effect, which usually results from the illegitimate use of power. Since backlash can greatly exacerbate conflict, strategies for its moderation or avoidance are crucial. Conflicting parties need to understand how to develop sources of power which are widely viewed as legitimate.

### Bringing It All Together

The final course segment considers strategies for creatively mixing trading power, persuasive power, and forcing power, and for moving back and forth between power contests and negotiation strategies.

### PROBLEM/SOLUTION-ORIENTED INTERFACE

We recognize that many potential users will be involved in crisis situations and will simply not have the time needed to take the full course. Their need is for quick and helpful suggestions on how to deal with immediate problems. For these individuals we are offering an optional, problem/solution-oriented interface where users will be asked a series of questions identifying typical conflict problems. Users could indicate which specific problems they were encountering, and the program would provide them with information explaining typical sources of the problem, and general strategies for dealing with it. The system will also give concrete examples of successful efforts to mitigate various problems with citations to sources of further information (which may either be written descriptions or people or organizations to contact). Examples of these problems/questions are listed below. All the user needs to do is "click" on a problem to see the analysis of possible solutions.

#### **Stereotypes**

Do other people, especially opponents, continue to view your group with the same old inaccurate and derogatory stereotypes?

#### **Destructive Interactions**

Do meetings and other interactions between opposing sides tend to degenerate into angry, destructive confrontations in spite of the best of intentions?

#### **Misunderstandings**

Does your group have trouble making itself understood by others?

**Problems with Extremists**

Are your group's efforts to build better relationships undermined by extremists who, clinging to the old hostilities, do things that rekindle the old animosities?

**Fact-Finding**

Do opposing parties have trouble agreeing on the basic facts associated with a conflict? (Such factual issues are distinct from issues of opinion and values.)

**Moving from Bitter Confrontation to Negotiation**

Is your group locked in a costly and destructive stalemate with no one wanting to admit that it is time to negotiate a compromise?

**Developing Opportunities for Mutual Gain**

Is your community looking for ways to quit fighting over limited resources and pursue cooperative efforts to expand the resource base?

**Building Collaborative Relationships**

Do you have an idea for a joint project that would benefit all parties but need help in deciding how to approach potential partners?

**Religious Coexistence**

Are members of your community, who adhere to different and incompatible religions, looking for ways to coexist without threatening each other's faith?

**Resisting Human Rights Violations**

Is your group looking for nonviolent ways to resist repression and discrimination?

**RELATIONSHIP WITH FACE-TO-FACE TRAINING**

Use of telecommunications-based distance learning programs is new, especially for those who have relied on face-to-face training programs in the past. While we do not pretend that this on-line system is as good as face-to-face training, we do believe that its low-cost allows it to fulfill an important void. We also believe that it is an important supplemental resource for face-to-face training programs. Often these programs are of short duration, with either students or trainers returning to the other side of the world once the program is completed. The proposed program provides a valuable follow-on resource which students users can use to answer the inevitable additional questions which arise as they try to apply their new skills. The program also provides much more information than could be included in a face-to-face program.

**ACCESSIBLE ENGLISH**

Course materials are written in a simple style, which can be easily understood and translated by persons with limited English skills. We minimize the use of jargon, idiomatic phrases, overly complex sentence structures, and illustrations unlikely to be widely understood. All terms essential for the understanding of conflict processes are carefully defined using vocabulary commonly found in translation dictionaries. Special attention is given to common terms (such as escalation, conflict, or dispute) which are used in precise ways which differ from common dictionary meanings. We are also seeking funding beyond the United States Institute of Peace to translate the core materials into principal international languages: French, Spanish, and Russian. Multi-lingual fliers and electronic announcements advertise the potential

benefits and easy translation features of this program. Supplementary resource materials also include non-English works.

#### CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING CONSIDERATIONS

While some processes of conflict and conflict resolution are human universals, some are society-specific. Despite our best efforts to develop a truly multi-cultural program there is, inevitably, a bias toward the United States' view of the field. An introductory course module acknowledges this bias and suggests ways in which users might adapt the materials to their particular situations. This module summarizes multi-cultural conflict research and illustrates how different cultures approach similar aspects of conflict in different ways. We also include in supplementary resource materials articles, books, and exercises exploring the multi-cultural character of conflict.

#### USER SCENARIOS

In closing, we offer three scenarios describing how we hope that the system might be used.

##### Scenario #1

Narayan is the mayor of a small city in Southern India. In 1997 he participated in a tour of conflict resolution institutions sponsored by the United States Information Agency and Meridian International. As part of this tour he came to the University of Colorado where he witnessed a demonstration of the on-line training system and received a brochure describing ways of accessing it in Southern Asia. On returning to India, Narayan began to work with others with similar interests to establish a conflict resolution center to build on Gandhian conflict approaches while incorporating more recent ideas from around the world. Based upon information provided by the Consortium, he was able to identify someone working with the regional affiliate of the Association for Progressive Communications, and a person in the computer science department of a nearby university. This group was able to arrange several hours of access to the global computer networks each week. They were also able to obtain modest funding for acquisition of printed resource materials from the Consortium. Thanks to a small "scholarship" grant the Consortium was able to provide these materials at affordable prices. Over the next several years, the Center increasingly used the system to teach people better ways of dealing with difficult conflicts. The users' comments enabled the Consortium to improve the system by incorporating useful ideas which the Indians had developed into the system. Through the system's electronic discussion groups, the Indian group made contact with a similar organization operating in Pakistan. This relationship has since developed into a significant non-governmental effort to reduce tensions between the two countries.

##### Scenario #2

Shimon, an Israeli, and Abdul, a Palestinian, are members of a citizen's organization established to reduce Palestinian/Israeli violence and to constructively address the issues which divide their two societies. They wish to learn what they can from others who have had to deal with similar ethnic, religious, and territorial conflicts. They recognize that their situation is unique and that "turn-key" systems imported from other nations will not work. What they need is an efficient way to learn how others might have approached similar problems so that they can begin the work of selecting the most useful ideas and adapting them to their needs. They obtain modest funding for computer access, supplementary resource materials, and translation services and become a training group in the

Consortium network. Study groups of Palestinians and Israelis then begin using the system to develop a better background in the conflict resolution field. They write several essays outlining how specific ideas might be adapted to their specific situation. These essays then serve as a basis for an electronic discussion, which further advances the knowledge base offered by the Consortium program and provides an opportunity for several people to work simultaneously on the Israeli-Palestinian problem. The ability of electronic networks to span political divides also permits the two sides to conduct an online discussion that would be very difficult to conduct in a face-to-face format.

### Scenario #3

Maria is a human rights activist in Guatemala. Through her work with Amnesty International, she has been using the global electronic mail capabilities of the Internet for years. She first became aware of the Consortium system through an advertisement distributed to users of the Amnesty International system. Since she knew that escalation dynamics play an important role in sustaining the cycles of violence that encourage human rights abuses, she was very interested in exploring strategies for breaking these cycles. Through the course materials, she began pursuing a new approach to her human rights work, which she based upon one of the course assignments posted by the Consortium. She has persuaded a number of her associates to use the Consortium system as a basis for more effective community conflict moderation.

---

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate particular policies.

*This paper was prepared for the Virtual Diplomacy conference hosted by United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. on April 1 and 2, 1997.*