THE CENTER FOR JUSTICE & PEACEBUILDING A PROGRAM OF EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY	**FACILITATING CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: WORKING WITH FIRE** **PAX 684** **SPI 2026** June 8-12, 2026 *Course meeting location and time:* TBA

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

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Please email me to arrange meetings, via video conferencing platform or phone

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Designed for experienced facilitators, this course deepens the skills needed to design and hold courageous, inclusive dialogue processes amid conflict and complexity. Together, we will explore such core questions as: How do we help create and hold space for people and groups of all sizes to engage with each other in transformative change amidst conflict? How can we create conditions to enable people to connect across polarized divides amidst 'culture wars' – or actual wars? How can dialogue support conflict resolution, while empowering shifts in relationships and system-structures? How can facilitation help to strengthen social movements and prepare for engagement across divides? How can we proactively cultivate spaces in which all feel empowered to be their authentic selves and where systemic power asymmetries are addressed within and through the process? How can people feel compassionately held as they grapple with complex, contentious and even harmful issues and situations? And how can they do their best thinking together, so as to find creative and integrative solutions to contentions and complex challenges?

COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

This class is intended for people already experienced in facilitating groups and who want to engage more intentionally with conflict and change processes. It will deepen understanding and skills for:
- Integrating conflict analysis lenses and principles with deliberative dialogue process design to enable purposeful and effective process design.
- Conducting an inclusive consultative assessment process: exploring and assessing the context, framing the guiding questions and enabling co-design, and grappling with ethical and strategic issues in convening processes.
- Creating the container to hold challenging conversations with courage, care and creativity.
- Methods for deep dialogue to foster human connection, empathy and widening perspectives and understanding.
- Methods for working with the past and for envisioning the future
- Principles and practices for collaborative decision-making and facilitating consensus building.
- TBC: Methods for using innovative deliberative technologies to scale up participation – and even to engage publics in the process.

- Structured and multi-modal reflection for deepening presence, self-awareness and self-management, values and ethics clarification, and setting intentions for the 'inner journey' for deepening capacities to hold space and be facilitative.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND OTHER RESOURCES:

A set of pre-readings and daily readings and resources will be available for all participants in the class Moodle site. There will also be an extensive collection of resources on specific process methods and where to turn for additional information.

- Kraybill, Ron, and Evelyn Wright. 2007. *Cool Tools for Hot Topics: Group Tools to Facilitate Meetings When Things Are Hot. The Little Books of Justice and Peacebuilding.* Intercourse, PA: Good Books. $6.00 ISBN: 1561485438

Choose 2 for reading reflection assignments (graduate credit students)

- Adam Kahane. 2012. *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change.* Berrett-Koehler Publishers. ISBN-10: 145962632X; $18 paperback

- adrienne maree brown. 2021. *Holding Change: The Way of Emergent Strategy Facilitation and Mediation.* Chico, CA: AK Press. ISBN-13: 9781849354189; $15 paperback.

- Bernard S. Mayer and Jacqueline Font-Guzmán. 2022. *The Neutrality Trap: Disrupting and Connecting for Social Change*. John Wiley & Sons. - ISBN-10**:** 1119793246; $18-$25 hardcover

- TBD

REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS:

All participants are expected to complete the preparatory readings and to participate fully in all class sessions during the SPI time.

This course is offered for 2 graduate credit hours or for professional education / training.
The following are required for participants taking the class for graduate credit.

Daily reflection journal / video diary, <u>during</u> SPI class session (20%) – With the goal of deepening reflective practitioner habits, after each class session, participants will reflect on their insights and key questions that emerged from their experiences that day - referring to specific concepts, sources or events from the day – and record these reflections either in a video or voice diary using 'VoiceThread' or in writing. *Due on Monday June 15, 2026.*

Reading reflections: informing theories of change and theories of practice (35%) – With the goal of deepening the development of theories of change and theories of practice for facilitating transformative change – as well as awareness of specific methods and techniques – prepare three short essays of 3-5 pages each in response to three course books. One will be the Sam Kaner et al, Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making + a choice between two of the 4 books identified above for reading reflection assignments. Each essay on will: (a) Describe 3-4 ideas likely to be useful for you – why? How might you integrate into your practice? (b) Describe 3-4 ideas that puzzled you or

give rise to questions and critiques. (c) Conclude with how the author's ideas and stories may inform your own theories of change, theories of practice and ethical stance. *Due no later than August 7, 2026.*

Final project (45%) Due no later than August 7, 2026.

- **Option A: Facilitated Process Analysis and Alternative Process Design** - *The analysis portion of the paper should be <u>no</u> longer than 3-4 pages <u>single</u> spaced; the alternate process agenda and notes can be whatever length is needed.* You will intentionally observe a formally organized meeting, where you do not have a stake in the outcome. (Note: you should not be a participant or member of the group.) Your task is to analyze the effectiveness of the process design and the characteristics of the meeting facilitator and / or chair. You should identify the implicit theories of change and theories of practice in use and assess their efficacy in meeting the purpose of the group. Integrating the readings and the ideas and methods you are learning in class, you will then design an alternate process agenda for achieving the implicit and explicit goals and objectives of the meeting that addresses the issues you identified in the first part of this assignment.

- **Option B: Transformative Facilitator Formation – Self Assessment and Setting Intentions for Growth** - *This paper should be <u>no longer</u> than 5-7 pages single spaced.* The purpose of this paper is to have an opportunity to honestly evaluate your own personal strengths and challenges in group processes – as a member of a group, as a facilitator or leader, and as a process designer – in settings where you expect to find yourself in the future. You will identify the areas in which you want to grow and your 'learning edges', setting your intentions for growth. You are encouraged to use insights from your reflective practitioner journal, as well as feedback received from peers and colleagues. You should also refer to key ideas from your readings and class to deepen your assessment, using proper citations for all references.

These are brief descriptions of required graded assignments for the course. More details for each assignment can be found on the "Guidance Notes" that will be provided in class.

DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE:

TBA

SPI ATTENDANCE POLICY:

It is expected that individuals registering for an SPI session will attend the entire course (barring unforeseen travel delays or emergencies). Please contact SPI directly at spi@emu.edu before registering if you know you will have to miss any days of a course. SPI certificates are provided to participants only if they miss no more than one class day unless prior arrangements have been made with the SPI team and confirmed with the instructor. **For-credit participants are expected to attend all class sessions unless they are given permission from the instructor to miss a session.** SPI courses rely on active student participation in a learning community. If a participant misses class repeatedly and this disrupts the learning for others, they will be asked to leave the course and no money will be refunded for remaining course time.

GRADING CRITERIA AND OTHER POLICIES:

SPI provides all students taking the course for graduate credit some supplemental information that will serve as a resource after SPI when students are working on course assignments. This includes information on library resources, EMU's academic integrity policy, and guidelines for writing graduate

papers, information regarding the grading scale and course deadlines, and then some suggestions we have for you in order to make your experience of taking SPI courses for graduate credit as successful as possible! These [documents](#) are all available online.