



# Middlebury

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June 7, 2023

Greetings, Alumni College Students!

I am thrilled to spend a few late-summer days together in our course, Conflict Transformation Skills. Coming at the start of my 16th year at the College, this course brings together many of my different interests. The global nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that I study often work on issues that generate conflict with governments and businesses, and they have varied success in achieving their goals. Locally, even small communities like Middlebury College or my town of Vergennes can struggle to manage diverse interests and views.

I imagine all of you have encountered conflicts that have been challenging to address. At their worst, conflicts can result in broken relationships or violence and destruction. But conflict is not necessarily bad—in fact, it is a normal part of the human experience. In your own lives, you may also have seen ways in which conflict has helped a relationship or community grow.

Our time together offers an opportunity to reflect on our own experiences in conflict and explore a range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to transform conflicts from destructive to productive. The relatively new field of “conflict transformation” recognizes that the skills that we use in our interpersonal interactions are those required for high-level negotiation, mediation, and intercultural communication. This means that we can practice those skills with the people in our daily lives and local communities—and at Alumni College!

Before you arrive on campus, I have a few small asks to help us prepare for our time together. First, I encourage you to pick up a copy of Amanda Ripley’s book *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out* (Simon and Schuster, 2021). It is a quick and engaging read, but if you prefer podcasts or are short on time, [check out this episode](#) of *On Being* with Ripley. Second, please take this [free “conflict styles” self-assessment test](#) on the U.S. Institute of Peace website.

I look forward to seeing you in August, and please be in touch with any questions or concerns!

Respectfully,

Sarah Stroup  
Professor of Political Science  
Director, Kathryn Wasserman Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation