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PROJECT ON LEADERSHIP *and* BUILDING STATE CAPACITY

LEADERSHIP NOTES SERIES

Core Competencies for Graduate Programs in Coexistence and Conflict Work—Can We Agree?

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AN INTRODUCTION FROM LEADERSHIP PROJECT DIRECTOR HOWARD WOLPE:

Many of the world's vulnerable states are in need of strategic initiatives to strengthen pre- and post-conflict peace-building. The challenges of peace-building and conflict transformation need to be addressed by a well-equipped professional corps, both indigenous and international, trained in the basic competencies of conflict prevention, management and resolution.

Graduate Programs in Conflict/Coexistence² Studies are designed to increase their participants' capacity to contribute to the development and implementation of non-military approaches to the prevention, management and resolution of violent intra-state, national and global conflicts.³ Despite the extensive increase in the number of such programs over the last two decades at both the graduate and undergraduate level, there is little agreement among accrediting institutions as to what the core competencies for such a program should be. Such competencies, which are common to many professional fields, address the agreed knowledge and practical skills that participants need to effectively work in the field, and represent an agreement on the

values that underlie such work. Without such agreement, the perception, validity and usefulness of these degrees suffer due to an uncertainty on the part of employers as to the knowledge and skills sets they can expect from graduates.

Conflict Resolution programs currently provide a composite approach to the many forms of conflict and peace studies. Programs that substantially focus on the intra-societal and international dimension of conflict resolution number approximately twelve in the United States.

These programs include modules examining, for example, the study of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), and various methods of inter-personal, intra-communal and inter-societal conflict resolution. However, the international or extra-national dimension of conflict is often not adequately addressed, nor is the development of practice and policy skills for the field. While there are some transferable skills from individual conflict resolution work, the complexity and political sensitivities of intra-societal and international level conflict resolution call for group process factors and collective approaches that require specific in-depth knowledge and training, and these are often absent in the programs.

1. Prior to directing the MA program on Coexistence and Conflict at Brandeis University, Mari Fitzduff was Director of UNU/INCORE, a United Nations University center for research on conflict issues in Northern Ireland. She was the founding director of the Community Relations Council which funded and developed many of the coexistence programs in Northern Ireland.

2. These programs are variously labeled. Examples of program designation include: Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Conflict Studies, Peace and Justice Studies, Program in Conflict Transformation, Peace and Conflict Studies, Violence Prevention and Response and Coexistence Studies. In this paper, the term coexistence is used to cover the range of work that is necessary to ensure that communities and states can live more equitably and peacefully together including conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation, peace studies, as well as diversity and multicultural work.

3. While recognizing that military approaches may have a positive role to play in many situations of conflict, it is assumed that MA graduate programs will generally assist the study and development of interventions that are of a non-military nature, and that are complementary, or alternative where possible, to existing military approaches.

CORE COMPETENCIES FOR GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN CO

Negotiation programs also lack coherence and are often scattered among different faculties of an institution including the Law, Education and Public Policy Faculties amongst others. The resulting competition within the various departments hampers the emergence of cohesive programs, and the fact that many are taught outside of the context of overall conflict resolution knowledge and skills work often diminishes their capacity to be effective.

In addition, many positions within the field are being filled by Ph.D. graduates with specialized knowledge regarding the subject matter of their doctoral work, and the curricula of Conflict Resolution Programs and Negotiation Programs often consist of the sum of the experts that teach within these faculties, rather than emerging from an agreed template of essential core competencies. There has also been little appraisal and feedback from policymakers and practitioners about how such competencies could adequately—or otherwise—meet the needs in the field and hence the validity and usefulness of such conflict resolution and negotiation degrees are often challenged in the working world. As a result, many policy and practice institutions in the field have stated that they would welcome greater clarity and cohesion regarding program content. Lucid core competencies and program design would empower employers to have a benchmark of expectations for such graduates.

This set of core competencies has therefore been drawn up by Mari Fitzduff to stimulate the discussion about such competencies within all relevant fields, both academic and practice-based. We would be delighted to hear from those of you who have ideas about how agreement on such competencies can be addressed, and your ideas about how to take this issue forward.

SUGGESTED CORE COMPETENCIES FOR GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN COEXISTENCE AND CONFLICT WORK:

1. Core Knowledge Competencies

As a result of their studies, graduates of an MA program should be able to:

- a) understand the **main structural and psycho-cultural theories** about the causes of conflict and violence within and between societies, and at a global level. Structural theories address issues of justice, equity and rights, and political, constitutional, legislative, military and governance issues. Psycho-cultural theories are those that address the lack of communication, trust and positive relationships between the groups in conflict;
- b) understand theories of **group leadership and followership**, as well as **social change theories** that are relevant to the analysis of coexistence conflicts, and to the development of positive coexistence interventions;
- c) through **case analyses**, and **in partnership with conflict stakeholders**, identify and understand the political, historic, military, socio-economic, governance, organizational and institutional issues that are relevant to the existence of particular violent conflicts;
- d) **identify possible intervention needs** at any stage of a conflict including **conflict prevention**, which is aimed at addressing emerging tensions in societies, and the **mitigation and resolution** of violent conflicts, as well as **post-violence and post settlement** necessities;
- e) **ascertain** the various **levels** of society at which such interventions need to take place including within and between top leadership (e.g. governments, military), middle leadership (e.g. major institutions) and local communities, and the relevant **co-operations between these levels** that are needed to ensure successful interventions;
- f) be aware of the **options available for intervention** such as legislation, equity work, political agreements, human rights norm setting, constitutional developments, social capital development, military, political and economic approaches, as well as dialogue and mediation approaches;
- g) understand the relevance of the **roles and capacities of international and regional organizations** such as the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organization of American States, Association of South East Asian Nations and the World Bank, as well as the various governmental units who are addressing issues of conflict;

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- h)** comprehend how such interventions will also address **the linkage work** that needs to take place **among interveners and their activities** to maximize complementarities in addressing the conflicts both within the field, and with aid and development agencies, democracy and governance agencies, as well as human rights and economic development agencies;
 - i)** be aware of the existing and emerging approaches to **monitoring and evaluation** in the field, and the relevance and appropriateness of such approaches to the effectiveness of coexistence work;
 - j)** recognize the **cross-cultural considerations** that need to be taken into account in undertaking interventions;
 - k)** have a keen understanding of **institutional cultures and dynamics**, and their relevance to the uptake of coexistence work as either a prime focus, or as an additional responsibility within institutions;
 - l)** **understand and address the ethical issues** that are relevant to the development of coexistence interventions;
 - m)** **continue to learn** from research from the field, so as to foster their own learning and that of others who are committed to being more effective in their work.
- c)** **secure and develop partnerships** with other agencies and fields in order to assist a comprehensive and more successful approach to coexistence work from communities, governments, aid and development and democracy and governance agencies, relevant IGOs and NGOs, legislative bodies, businesses, politicians, civil society, etc.;
 - d)** design **monitoring and evaluation processes**, in partnership with local and external interveners and with donors so as to ensure the effectiveness or otherwise of coexistence interventions;
 - e)** **implement policies and programs** within, or in conjunction with, relevant institutions, communities and regions, and at a global level;
 - f)** **help secure support and funding** for intervention work, particularly for indigenous groups whose resources and options for such resources may be very limited;
 - g)** **foster dialogue** with relevant individuals, groups and institutions on difficult and contentious issues, as well as using **empathetic facilitation, mediation and negotiation skills** that can help participants to reach consensus among parties with divergent interests and objectives in group, community, international and transnational disputes;
 - h)** **undertake, supervise and commission research** on issues that are relevant to a greater understanding of the necessities needed to design and implement more effective policy and practice processes for coexistence work.

2. Core Skill Competencies

As a result of their studies, graduates of an MA program should be able to:

- a)** **assess particular conflicts**, including existing and emerging structural and psycho-cultural issues, through a reading of the relevant literature, through understanding and listening to key groups and individuals involved in the conflict, being aware of the history and success or otherwise of previous interventions and understanding the cultural sensitivities involved in the conflicted areas;
- b)** **design strategic coexistence interventions** that are likely to contribute to conflict resolution and more peaceful coexistence between groups and nations, and address specific conflicts at the appropriate stage of their development;

3. Specialist Competencies

In addition to the above core competencies, it is also useful if there are theorists or practitioners who specialize in particular competencies within the work field, and who can be called upon for interventions as needed. These could be **regional or national** specialists, as well as **issue** specialists who are working on constitutional or legislative work, aid and development issues, democracy and governance work, gender work, arts and cultural work or work with religious or military institutions. Practitioners who specialize in **assessment, mediation, negotiation or evaluation** are also important, as are those

who have acquired particular **language skills**, e.g. Spanish, French, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, which are relevant to conflict areas.

4. Values of Coexistence Work⁴

a) Goals of the work

The goal of coexistence work is to assist in the development of societies that are based on a commitment to the pursuit of equality, that respect diversity and that acknowledge the interdependence of communities and states.⁵

b) Primacy of Local People in Transforming Conflicts

A conviction that genuine conflict transformation is only possible and sustainable with the participation and involvement of those most affected by the conflict.

c) Humanitarian Concern

A belief that the prime motivation for the work is the ending of violence as a method of resolving conflict, and that an engagement in situations of violent conflict is driven principally by concern for the societies and peoples at risk from such conflicts.

d) Human Rights and Humanitarian Law and Principles

A commitment to the principles and practice of promoting human rights in situations of violent conflict, to compliance with international humanitarian law and standards (whether legal or non-legal) and to respect for human rights amongst all parties to the conflict and in any agreements that are made between the parties.

e) Respect for Gender and Cultural Diversity

A commitment to supporting the engagement of women in societies affected by violent conflict, as well as a respect for the dignity and cultural diversity of all peoples and a commitment to making no discrimination on grounds of nationality, race, class, gender or religious, cultural or political beliefs.

f) Impartiality

A commitment to working as inclusively as possible, to actively seeking access to all the relevant parties to the conflict and to not taking sides in the conflict. If

a practitioner decides to undertake advocacy work for a particular side, s/he should be open about this and ensure that all parties to the conflict understand the relevance and import of that role.

g) Accountability

An understanding that practitioners are morally responsible to those whom they seek to assist, and accountable to those with whom they work. They will need to ensure appropriate accountability through reporting mechanisms to those they serve, to their donors and through endeavoring to be as open and transparent in their work as is possible without limiting its effectiveness.

h) Confidentiality

Whilst endeavoring to be open and transparent, practitioners are committed to maintaining confidentiality in situations where the effectiveness of their programs or the security of those with whom they work may be at risk.

i) Cooperation

A commitment to working in collaboration and complementarity with individuals, organizations, governments and other institutions which can contribute to the prevention and resolution of conflict.

j) Institutional Learning

A commitment to building up the collective pool of knowledge and experience for the field through undertaking regular reviews and evaluations of the work being undertaken, and to learning to share the lessons learned from such work with relevant individuals and organizations who may benefit from them and, in turn, a commitment to learn from the experiences and knowledge of others.

Comments welcome to:

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4. These are based on the Code of Conduct drawn up by International Alert, in conjunction with others in the Coexistence field. www.international-alert.org

5. These concepts were initially identified in Eyben et al. (1997) *A Worthwhile Venture: Practically investing in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence in Northern Ireland*, University of Ulster. Echoing such values, Oxfam has suggested that coexistence work is about "recognizing each other's status and rights as human beings, developing a just and inclusive vision for each community's future, and implementing economic, social, cultural or political development across former community divides." Babbitt et al. (2002), *Imagine Coexistence — Findings and Recommendations for UNHCR*, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, p.16.

THE PROJECT ON LEADERSHIP AND BUILDING STATE CAPACITY

Howard Wolpe, Director

The Project on Leadership and Building State Capacity, launched in June 2005, expands upon the work of the former Conflict Prevention Project and responds to the growing demand for leadership training directed at both the prevention of violent conflict and the reconstruction of war-torn societies.

There is an emerging awareness of the importance of leadership training in achieving sustainable peace. On a technical level, the art of building democratic state capacity is well understood. But the harder political task—helping the leaders of warring factions achieve their objectives, to work collabora-



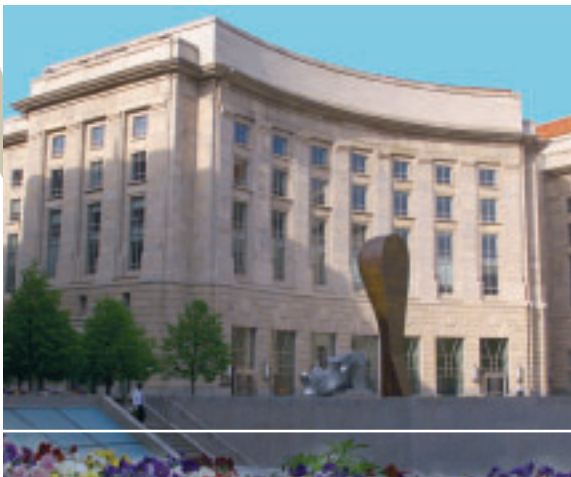
Howard Wolpe

tively in avoiding war or supporting post-war reconstruction and to build democratically accountable links between the governors and the governed—requires a careful examination of the underappreciated “leadership factor” in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction.

Under the leadership of former Congressman and Presidential Special Envoy Howard Wolpe, the Leadership Project aims to address the missing process and leadership dimensions of peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction; to expand the cadre of professional trainers capable of working in regions in conflict or emerging from conflict; and to deepen the international community’s capacity to conceptualize, implement and manage these complex interventions.

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