

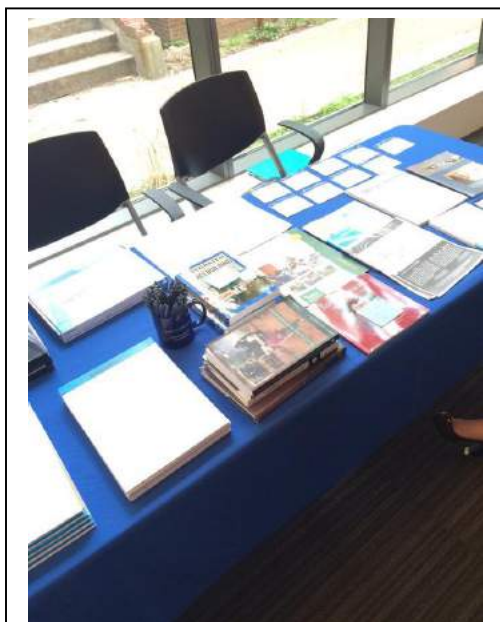
# The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Academic Symposium: Innovation in Graduate Peace and Conflict Resolution Education



The 5th Annual Academic Symposium for Innovation in Graduate Peace and Conflict Education was hosted by Georgetown University in conjunction with the Alliance for Peacebuilding and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), on May 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The event took place after more than six months of planning by a committee of leading academics and administrators. Over 100 scholars, students and practitioners in the field of peace and conflict studies field gathered in Washington, D.C., to discuss the future of the conflict resolution field.

Through workshops, panels, and discussions, the 1.5-day event provided the opportunity for faculty, administrators, staff, and students of graduate programs in peacebuilding, peace studies, and conflict resolution to discuss the effectiveness of graduate academic programs in training the next generation of scholars and professionals. Colleagues also had the opportunity to share curricular, skills-building, and administrative innovations, and to foster collaborative learning. This year's symposium followed four previous annual meetings, which gathered an increasing number of graduate programs engaged in international peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities.

## Day One Highlights



*Along with engaging in discussion, participants also shared their latest publications with their colleagues*

The first day provided a space for program directors, administrators, and other faculty members and staff with leadership roles in their respective programs, to discuss the finer details of program make-up and planning. The conference began at Georgetown's new Healy Family Center with lunch, and a panel discussion on "Innovation and Disruption in Higher Education in Conflict Resolution." Led by four speakers of unique backgrounds, the panel featured lively discussion on current practices, and the speakers' work in bringing new concepts into the field.

Jayne Docherty, the Chair of the Conflict Transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University, spoke about her program's work with blending different areas of focus and practice by creating more integrated core courses. Topics discussed included trauma healing and restorative

justice, theater, food systems, and permaculture. According to Docherty, this enables students to gain a broader sense of what is possible with a degree in the field, and develop an understanding of complex adaptive systems. Docherty also raised an interesting question as to whether conflict should be the main focus of their program. Conversations and interventions pertain to more than solely conflict, they are increasingly about ‘justice building’ and ‘peacebuilding’, and in many cases conflict serves as an indicator of other issues, and not only as the primary problem to be solved. This point raised an important issue plaguing many programs today, about how to train students to look beyond the blatant causes of violence, and narrow in on the deeper roots of conflict.

Later on in the day, Daryn Cambridge, Senior Program Officer at USIP’s Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding, led a discussion about the role of online training opportunities. Cambridge stressed the need to focus on online learning, as it is increasingly becoming the easiest and cheapest of reaching a global audience at scale. With this, he posed two questions for the audience: (1) how do we move away from negative experiences people have had with online classes previously? and (2) how do we reach nontraditional/adult learners while making it a meaningful experience?

By way of an answer, Cambridge presented the profile of the country “Suenalto”. This is a module used by USIP’s Global Campus that provides background to a conflict in an imaginary country/territory, allowing students to engage with and talk about conflict analysis. To facilitate online learning, the Global Campus provides videos that help the students think about how to develop conflict analysis, and identify who they would talk to, later allowing them to work through the scenario. Additionally, live podcasts are available, as well as tools allowing students to discuss with one or more classmate(s) and exchange ideas. By creating an interactive and engaging platform, the Global Campus allows students to share their skills and learn from a collaborative setting usually only available in a traditional classroom setting.

After this session, participants were given the opportunity to attend open space meetings on one of five topics: (1) recruitment, (2) career guidance, (3) alumni engagement, (4) online education, and (5) entrepreneurship. The subsequent discussions offered the chance to share and learn about best practices, challenges, innovations, etc.

Following these meetings, participants were able to regroup and share lessons from their small group discussions before adjourning for the day.

## **Day Two Highlights**

The following day, the conference began at USIP, with an expanded group of participants, including faculty, staff, and students from Conflict and Peace Studies programs across the country, in addition to the administrators and directors from the previous day.

The first panel of the day, titled “Disrupting Higher Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, included three panelists: Dr. George Lopez, Dr. Patricia Marquez, and Dr. Amr Abdalla, as well as moderator Dr. Ron Fisher. Dr. Fisher began by directly stating two main concerns in the field: (1) that it is underdeveloped professionally and (2) that it is stagnant educationally. He then invited each panelist to address these two points by speaking about strides they have made in each of their programs to combat concerns and difficulties.



*Dr. Lopez, Dr. Marquez, Dr. Abdalla, and Dr. Fisher discussing Disrupting Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

Dr. Lopez responded by first outlining two accomplishments of conflict and peace studies programs. First, a major academic contribution of the field is that international affairs programs are not seen as legitimate unless they offer some kind of conflict resolution component. A second accomplishment of the field has been the ability to successfully integrate coursework and work experience into the graduate curricula. Where Lopez saw room for improvement was in the need for programs to provide their graduating students with more diverse skills that can be applied in growing cross-sectors within conflict resolution. A few of these sectors include business, criminal justice, and mass communication.

Dr. Marquez echoed this statement by stressing the need to make peace education a more legitimate and widely acknowledged field of international relations, by putting theory into practice. She stressed the need to embrace new and different learning models to help students move from specializing in various disciplines to being interdisciplinary or cross-sector specialists. Marquez also called for programs to shape academia instead of programs being shaped by academic traditions.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Dr. Abdulla, who emphasized the international dimension of the field, and the need for content, recruitment, and pedagogy to be considered when shaping the global best practices of the field.

During lunch, the keynote for the day, Randy Bass, took the podium. Randy Bass is Vice Provost for Education at Georgetown University, and as such issued a strong call for the reformation of program design to tailor graduates to excel in the areas that are emerging in the human labor market. Echoing the sentiments from day one, Bass stressed the need for open online courses, and the need to create adaptive learning. One way he suggested

pursuing this was through the use of learning analytics. Through data analysis, professors have the ability to create personalized instructions to help students better comprehend material. In addition, skill-based learning is necessary to expand professional development.

One challenge Bass pointed out was that universities no longer have a monopoly on learning and certification. However, they remain unique in their ability to provide mentored learning. Thus, there must be a concerted effort to improve education through high-impact practices, such as learning communities, seminars, collaborative assignments, study abroad opportunities, capstone projects, etc. One way to practically do this is through connected learning. Bass expanded on this, saying, “Connected learning is realized when a young person pursues a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults, and in turn is able to link this learning to academic achievement, career possibilities and civic engagement.”

By reimagining how learning occurs, programs can better influence their students. Using the example of the university he works for, Bass spoke about the formation of students saying, “The concept of *formation* in the Jesuit tradition is at the heart of an education dedicated to shaping students to be fully human, and to cultivate a sense of personal responsibility for improving the world.”<sup>i</sup> Creating a space for students is the best way to advance programming, particularly in the field of conflict and peace studies.

The remainder of the conference gave participants a space in which to engage in smaller groups with fellow faculty and staff members, through small break-out workshops and a larger career panel. Some of the workshops included themes such as NGO-university



*Conference participants had the opportunity to interact while learning about peacebuilding, using experiential learning techniques with workshop leader Ana Patel.*

partnerships, experiential peacebuilding, needs assessment, and online learning. Many participants remarked that the highlight of their time at the symposium was being able to engage with colleagues and learn about new techniques within the field. The interactive workshops were an integral part of this interaction.

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<sup>i</sup> See *The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Jossey-Bass, 2008) and related Carnegie studies of the professions.