



# Every Step



## Wellesley College Peace and Justice Studies Program Newsletter Spring 2019

### Inside

Welcome Announcement: Co-Director Larry Rosenwald (2)

Emily Greene Balch Announcement: Alexis Rivett (3)

Wellesley at the Oxford Global Ethics Seminar on War and Peace (5)

Senior Thesis Summary (7)

Year in Review (9)

# Welcome

It's my pleasure and honor to greet all who read this newsletter, full of the doings of students and faculty in our Program, in Lebanon, in England, in India.

A word about India in particular, because our Wintersession expedition there was extraordinary. The India course was once the jewel in the Program's crown, but its regular director left the College some years ago, and those of us who remained couldn't for a long time find the energy or the will to revive it, to remake it. That we did so was due to the efforts of our own Catia Confortini, and of our wonderful South Asia Studies colleague (and singer, and dancer, and storyteller) Neelima Shukla-Bhatt, who resourcefully and patiently and tenaciously put together and led a transformative course for the sixteen students lucky enough to take it, the sixteen students we were lucky enough to work with. Impossible to pick out a single moment in a sequence of such luminous moments, but if one had to pick just one, it would probably be our unplanned, improbable, yet somehow fated meeting with Gandhi's grandson Arun Gandhi, on the grounds of the Aga Khan Palace. We so easily might not have been there, dealing as we were then with illness and exhaustion, but we went nonetheless, and suddenly, on the quiet lawn, there he was, Arun Gandhi, carrying all the wisdom of his lineage in his quiet words, and not by words but by his presence blessing our enterprise.

It is a difficult world we live in "dark and full of terrors," as characters like to say on *Game of Thrones* – but miraculous moments like the one described above are sources of hope for us. So are the accomplishments of our students and faculty, and so, most importantly, are the aspirations that our students bring to the program, and which they carry away with them as they leave the program and the College and enter and transform the world. I say something like this to our graduates every year, it is always true, and it always, always brings tears to my eyes, and hope as well.

# Emily Greene Balch Announcement: Equitable Education in Beirut, Lebanon

**By the winner of the 2019 summer stipend: Alexis Rivett '21**



This summer, I will be traveling to Beirut, Lebanon to be a Programs Intern at Unite Lebanon Youth Program (ULYP). This nonprofit's mission is to empower Syrian Refugees and minority Lebanese populations through providing educational and economic opportunities and resources. Through this internship, I will be learning about the experiences of Syrian Refugees, how nonprofits are operated, the culture of Lebanon, and how the process of learning is impacted by trauma.

I applied for this internship because I am passionate about education and ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to learn and achieve their goals. Specifically, through my studies in Peace and Justice Studies, I have learned about the different approaches towards transforming conflict and helping people unite instead of remaining divided. I believe that education is one of the best ways that we can learn about other people and learn how to be active listeners who are open-minded. While interning with ULYP, I will be learning how to teach English and other applicable skills to a population that suffers from very traumatic events. Additionally, I will be supporting the programs team at ULYP with project management tasks, creating communication materials, and supporting activities in the field, such as helping teach classes. Like Peace and Justice studies, this will be a multidisciplinary internship that will help strengthen my communication, conflict management, marketing, and teaching skills.

During this internship, I hope to analyze and study first-hand the effects of instability on learning. Through my

studies at Wellesley while emphasizing in Educational Equity in P&J, I have begun learning about the complexities of the classroom and how impactful immigration, economics, social class, and conflict can be on a student and a school. My analysis has been deepened by my classes in the Education Dept. for my emphasis and I am beginning to understand that even if the curriculum is perfect, it is very difficult for a student to learn if their environment is deeply flawed. How can one focus on reading when they don't feel safe? I want to learn if there is an answer to this question during this internship while working with and learning from the women and children that are participating in the programs created by Unite Lebanon. These research questions will guide my internship and help me begin to explore the complexities of these issues.

I am so thankful and deeply grateful for the financial support through the Class of 1950 Emily Greene Balch scholarship. UYLP is deeply connected to the Class of 1950: its founder and executive director, Nicole Eid Abuhaydar, is the daughter-in-law of late Nancy Abuhaydar, class of 1950. Thanks to introductions made by Kitty Gladstone ('50), Nicole visited Prof. Confortini's PEAC 104 class in the Fall of 2018 -- and the seeds of this internship were planted! It means the world to me that I have such strong support in such an important and critical mission and I am excited to apply my knowledge from my studies in Education and Peace and Justice to this experience and learn so much in the process that will help deepen my studies when I return. I want to especially thank Professor Nadya Hajj and Professor Catia Confortini who are the ones who informed me of this experience and have been my support system this entire year, but especially while applying for this internship.





## Wellesley at the Oxford Global Ethics Seminar on War and Peace

This year from March 17<sup>th</sup> through March 23<sup>rd</sup> Oxford held a conference on global ethics surrounding War and Peace. The Peace and Justice program secured funding for 4 students to be able to attend. Throughout the weeklong program students heard lectures from professors, lawyers, technology developers, and mediators. Current students Anna Beyette, '21, Jhenna El-sawaf, '21, Tara Kholi, '21, and Laissa Alexis, '20, attended the conference with Co-Director of the Program, Catia Confortini. Below are pictures from the trip!



On the first day in Oxford the group went sight-seeing.





The students met up with alums in the area to get tea.



Here the students are pictured with poet Damian Gorman who writes poetic responses to conflict. He especially focuses on his childhood growing up during the Northern Ireland conflicts.



The conference ended with a formal banquet and a group photo of all the attendees.



# Senior Thesis Summaries

This year the Peace and Justice Studies Program had two Seniors write and defend theses. Here are brief overviews of each thesis. For more information on where to find the full theses, email Catia Confortini ([cconfort@wellesley.edu](mailto:cconfort@wellesley.edu)).

## **A Walk in Your Shoes? Exploring the limits and drivers of Empathetic Action Towards Venezuelans in Colombia.**

**By: Charlotte Kaufman, '19**



As neighboring countries, the histories of Colombia and Venezuela are deeply intertwined. In 2016, a peace treaty between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government marked the end of the overt 50-year armed conflict. Around the same time, hyperinflation began to peak in Venezuela, causing Venezuelans to seek refuge in Colombia after so many years of Colombians fleeing to Venezuela in search of safety.

This reversal of roles in such recent history makes a strong case for empathetic action in Colombia towards Venezuelan refugees. I define empathetic action as helping behavior based on the recognition of a shared experience. However, after visiting a UNHCR workshop for Venezuelan refugees last summer in Quibdó, Colombia—an area in Colombia with the highest proportion displaced people—I witnessed the stories of Venezuelan refugees who had been socially and economically barred from integration. This led to my thesis question: *What prevents empathetic action towards refugees in areas where many of the citizens already are, or have been, displaced?*

My methodology consisted of collecting 352 articles from six different newspapers from between 2015 and 2018. I categorized these articles based on the different types of empathetic action that surfaced—both among elites and individuals. I then weighed these trends against other factors such as shifts in key migration policies, variations by newspaper (which accounted for proximity to the border and potential for media bias), and the distribution of key words proving motivations behind empathetic action. Ultimately, the range of findings compiled began to tell a story: between 2015 and 2018 there was a growing polarity between



empathetic action and antipathetic action. At the same time there was a growing trend of individuals' dissatisfaction with elite decisions made regarding Venezuelan refugees. Finally, the motivations behind elite and individual empathetic action were very different all four years, which hints at a need for the elite to pay better attention to people's needs on the ground.

## **Faith and Femicide: The Catholic Church's Efforts to Combat Femicide in Guatemala**

**By: Maggie Ruden, '19**



Over the course of the 2018-2019 academic school year, I completed a senior thesis project entitled “Faith and Femicide: The Catholic Church’s Efforts to Combat Femicide in Guatemala.” Femicide is a form of violence against women that detrimentally affects the wellbeing of society in contemporary Guatemala, as well as in many other countries around the world. Unfortunately, this brutal crime, which is defined as being the “systematic” “killing of females by males because they are females,” is only one example of how women’s lives continue to be frequently viewed and treated as disposable (Tierney FitzGerald 2016, 2; Russell 2001, 13).

By drawing on scholarship from multiple academic disciplines including Women’s and Gender Studies, Theological Studies, Peace and Justice Studies and Political Science, my research aimed to expand my own, as well as my readers, understanding of this specific form of gender-based violence and to increase our ability to help address it. As an attempt to achieve this goal, I answered the central research question: *Though it has acted as a protector of the country’s most vulnerable communities in the past, is the Catholic Church, in fact, working to reduce rates of femicide in post-civil war Guatemala? And, if so how?* The process of my research included an analysis of the Guatemalan Catholic Church’s nine post-war collective pastoral letters, an investigation into the individual actions of the thirty-one Guatemalan Catholic bishops who signed those letters, and an exploration of the welfare programs hosted by six Guatemalan Catholic social organizations. After I completed this search for any explicit efforts to combat femicide, I developed the argument that this religious institution is neither working to reduce the country’s femicide rate nor acting in ways that cause it to worsen.

Since completing a thesis is never any easy task, I really have to thank and give credit to Professor Nadya Hajj for helping me tackle this daunting endeavor. I never expected to even attempt to write a thesis at Wellesley, but overall, I think it has taught me a lot about myself and my academic abilities, which definitely will benefit me in the long run.



## The Year in Review



Current student Anna Beyette, '21 (right), pictured with Peace and Justice alums, Heron Russell, Emily Wood, Rachel Nagin, Claire Yi, and Kanda Faye following an alum panel. Current P&J students had the opportunity to meet alums as well as ask questions about how their P&J degrees have been useful.

Co-Directors Catia Confortini and Larry Rosenwald sport reusable mugs from the Wellesley College Office of Sustainability.





The following pictures show current students with Professors Catia Confortini and Larry Rosenwald on a trip to India over wintersession. The trip followed a Peace and Justices Studies course on Gandhi and the non-violent movement in India.



“Do your little bit of good where  
you are; it’s those little bits of good  
put together that overwhelm the  
world”  
~Desmond Tutu



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