

From Initiative to Institute: How the Vision of Peace at USU Came to Life

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The Heravi Peace Institute (HPI) aims to empower students and equip them with the skills necessary to bring about social change. It answers the desperate call for individuals who create peace on personal, relational, societal, national, and international levels. Much like peacebuilding, the establishment of the HPI started with a handful of individuals courageous enough to answer the call for peace, and it has expanded into something much greater with a lasting impact. Four USU faculty—Colin Flint, Clair Canfield, Patrick Mason, and Tammy Proctor—were instrumental in the creation of the Heravi Peace Institute. What started as personal interest for each of these individuals has now become a university-wide institute that will educate students and change communities for generations to come. Their stories demonstrate that peacebuilding truly does start with you:

Where did your interest in a peace initiative start? What made you want to build something like the HPI at USU?

Patrick Mason: I got a master's degree in peace studies while I was doing my doctoral work. [Before that], I didn't

know there was a thing called peace studies. I accidentally took a class in which I met a bunch of people doing peace studies, and then I got a master's degree myself. I've sort of taken that with me to various places in my career. I'm primarily a historian and a religion scholar, but this has always been a part of me, the courses I teach, and the writing I do. I've always been interested in issues of peace and violence. When I came to Utah State, violence and peace were a big part of my profile. Then through conversations [with other faculty] we realized we should really do something because there's some shared interest here. That's really where it started — a conversation among colleagues with like-minded, overlapping interests to imagine what could be here. We were also responding to the want for more certificates, more on-the-ground type of education, things that will prepare students with skills that they can take out into the workforce. So, in a lot of ways our conversation was, what would it look like to have a certificate around peacebuilding and peace studies?

What does institute status mean for the HPI? Why is this such a big deal?

Colin Flint: [The institute status] shows that peacebuilding is not just a hope or an idea, it's a set of practices that have been with us for centuries, and those practices are something that the faculty have commitment to in their research, but most importantly through their teaching and their engagement with students. It is something that gives a foundation, something that is concrete, and something that is lasting. Through the generosity of Dr. Mehdi Heravi, the HPI will be here to stay, forever. It shows a permanent commitment of the university and of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences to enabling students to develop peacebuilding skills that they can use throughout their careers.

How do your perspectives answer the call for more peace in the world?

Clair Canfield: I have experienced the suffering of not knowing how to manage conflict within my relationships and within myself. The concepts, perspectives, and skills that I've learned have brought me more peace in my life and in my relationships, and have created relief and healing. After I experienced that, I had a great desire to ease the suffering I saw in others as well. The call I feel is to provide things that can ease the suffering that people have, and I think that brings more peace into their lives, their relationships, their communities. I answer that call by trying to live that way, model it for others, and offer it as an option or a choice as something that might be able to ease some of that pain or suffering.

What does peace mean to you?

Tammy Proctor: I think in a basic way and on a macro level, peace means the absence of war. It doesn't mean the absence of conflict, but certainly the first thing I think of with peace would be no war. I think of peacebuilding as a constructive, ongoing process to try to improve the conditions people live in. What's hard about [peacebuilding] is that I don't think there's an end. You can't ever let it stop. The other thing that's hard and really frustrating is a lot of it falls flat. What I learned from my experience in Northern Ireland is that despite the progress they had made in ending some of the really intense violence, they hadn't ended *violence*. Sometimes it's one step forward and two steps back, but the relationships built and the conversations started can hopefully lead to something in the future. I think that's what peacebuilding is — it's starting the conversation and the ongoing process.

Where do you see the Heravi Peace Institute going? What value does it bring to campus, communities, and beyond?

Patrick Mason: I'm really optimistic. I think [the institute] is going to thrive and it's going to grow. Just hearing from students, I think it meets a need, I think students crave this. Regardless of whether they're a history student or an English student, a business student, a biology student — everybody is going to engage in conflict in their personal lives, in their workplace certainly, in their communities, so this is a set of skills that I know that students need and that we all need. One of the reasons I was attracted to Utah State University is because of its mission as a land grant university; we're here to serve the public. There aren't very many better ways to serve the public than to train a bunch of people to engage in conflict constructively. Yes, we need to do a lot of different things in this world, but teaching a whole generation of people, hundreds and thousands of students coming out of USU having taken one, two, three, four courses on peace and peacebuilding, having those skills, then going out into whatever career — that would actually have a transformative effect on our society. That's the vision, and it's kind of big, it's kind of grand, it's kind of ambitious, but I don't think it's unreal.

[Learn more about the Heravi Peace Institute](#)