

# A Letter from the Interim Director: Educating for Peace in A Time of Conflict

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Open any news website or drive by your local university, and you will probably encounter activism around any number of global issues, but particularly the war in Ukraine and the conflict between Hamas and Israel. The tragic human carnage of these wars and the targeting of civilians in both regions has polarized campus communities in the United States, in some cases even sparking violence here at home. Given this reality and our contentious political environment, it might sound like a tough message to insist on the importance of teaching tools for the transformation of conflict.

The Heravi Peace Institute believes in the idea that our world is in desperate need of a new generation of innovative thinkers who approach conflict with empathy and creativity. Those peacebuilders must begin by developing and embodying the character traits that make for peace—beginning in their own lives and then radiating outward. If one of the major purposes of higher education is to prepare students to make a positive impact on society, there are few more pressing tasks than to equip these emerging adults with the temperament and tools they need in order to engage and transform conflict constructively.

While we are still in a building phase at the HPI, our efforts and generous support from donors has led to an experiential learning fund that supports students who want to have concrete out-of-the-classroom training through internships, conferences, and study abroad. The institute has committed itself to more such scholarships next year, including financial support for an affordable semester experience where students study the impact of war and peace in Vietnam. As we did in 2023-24, the HPI will sponsor a number of events and workshops around constructive conversations. Last year, those included campus events focused on topics including the Israel-Hamas conflict, the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan, and civil discourse in domestic politics.

In only a short time, the HPI has generated considerable excitement among students, faculty, donors, and alumni. The Interfaith Leadership program recently received a \$30,000 grant to expand its scope and impact. In the coming months, we will be launching new partnerships with USU statewide campuses and communities, including a fully online certificate in Global Peacebuilding. We welcome a new faculty member with conflict and mediation experience, Chad Ford, who is the author of *Dangerous Love: Transforming Fear and Conflict at Home, at Work, and in the World* (2020). The HPI also plans to expand the work of two existing programs: the conversational Space-Makers, which trains students to develop skills at “listening without judgment” in a peer mentorprogram. Austin Knuppe, one of our HPI Board members, is publishing a book this month that should help inform publicconversations: *Surviving the Islamic State: Contention, Cooperation, and Neutrality in Wartime Iraq*. Our study abroadsummer programs will enable students to visit Cuba, Rwanda, and the D-Day sites, just to name a few of our opportunities.

In short, the HPI refuses to cede the ground to defeatists and extremists. Instead, we want to empower students to be hopeful and engaged citizens. As Interim Director, it is my privilege to help lead these efforts.

--Tammy M. Proctor

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