

Building Bridges for a Living - A Lunch with Expert Mediators

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Gilliam and Ketchum at the meet and greet with HPI certificate Students

In November 2024, the Heravi Peace Institute hosted two expert mediators at Utah State University as a way to inspire students to consider careers in conflict resolution. Dr. W. Craig Gilliam and Karrie Ketchum led engaging discussions about the transformative potential of mediation and how students could pursue this rewarding field. Before their public panel discussion, which was facilitated by Prof. Chad Ford, they met with HPI certificate students for an informal lunch where they answered questions on pursuing careers in mediation.

Gilliam, founder of Gilliam and Associates, LLC, shared his journey from working with faith communities to becoming a private practitioner. He emphasized that mediation is not just about resolving disputes—it is about fostering collaboration and unity, especially in areas as challenging as intra-faith divisions. His work demonstrates that a career in mediation can start in niche fields like religious conflict and evolve to address broader societal challenges.

Ketchum, Executive Director of Utah Dispute Resolution, provided insights from her legal background. She described her shift from paralegal work to mediation and

highlighted how skills like narrative mediation can address family disputes more effectively than traditional legal approaches. Ketchum underscored the accessibility of mediation training, noting that students do not necessarily need a specific degree to get started, making this field an open and flexible career option. At USU, students will have options soon through the HPI for more formal education in mediation.

The speakers also discussed practical pathways to becoming a mediator. They explained how mediation careers can be pursued in diverse settings—independent practice, conflict resolution firms, or even court systems, which are particularly prominent in Utah.

Students responded positively to the event, particularly to the speakers' diverse professional trajectories. Many remarked that hearing about the unique paths taken by Dr. Gilliam and Ms. Ketchum—one rooted in faith communities and the other in legal mediation—helped them see the flexibility and breadth of opportunities in this field. Mediation can be more than a career—it can be a calling to help people navigate conflicts with empathy and creativity. As one attendee remarked, "It is inspiring to know there is no single path to becoming a mediator. The focus is on making an impact."