



# Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies: New Major Links Classes, Service Learning

BY DAN BARON

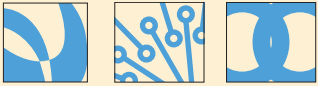
DePaul graduates Emily Anderson and Nic Cable focused their energies on a major that didn't even exist when they came to the university: Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies (PAX). As a new major, students are increasingly showing interest in the program through a wide variety of classes and opportunities to engage in service learning focused on some of the most critical issues of our times.

The Steans Center has partnered with PAX to play a pivotal role in linking students and classes to community organizations at the forefront of addressing these issues in Chicago and globally. The program provides students with the skills to reflect on the origins and causes of violence, as well as exposing them to non-violent approaches to social change. One defining feature of the program, says PAX Program Director Dr. Mary Jeanne Larrabee, is how it explores violence and non-violence on the local, international, and global levels. "The program asks questions like: How can conflicts be resolved? What are the different forms of justice?" says Larrabee. "And while students study these questions in the classroom, in many cases they also have the opportunity to learn in the field through service-learning opportunities." Professor Thomas O'Brien, former director of the PAX program and an associate professor of religious studies at DePaul, adds that service learning is an integral part of PAX classes. "Some kind of practical connection is essential to the learning process," he says. "Understanding is about making contact with people who are doing something on the ground."

Over the years the PAX minor program steadily attracted interest to the point where it made sense to offer a major degree program. "We are encouraging double majors," Larrabee says. "This program has a way of reaching a lot of different disciplines. Our idea is, 'Let's think about how these might work together – and figure out what skills you want to develop.'" Students who take PAX classes find that they are linked to a wide variety of disciplines at DePaul across all colleges and schools. Larrabee adds that classes in the major can include a wide range of approaches - including research, novels, film, international studies, website and database development, economics, public relations and advertising and more. The program offers a range of courses that focus on international conflicts, human rights, conflict resolution, peace building, activism, and social justice.



Student David Urie works with the Chicago Religious Leadership Network as part of his curriculum in the Peace, Justice, and Conflict Studies major (PAX).



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## DIRECTOR'S LETTER

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, there were 29 intrastate and 7 internationalized ongoing armed conflicts in 2009 (<http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/>). The U.S. defense budget for fiscal year 2010 was over \$530 billion. The federal budget for education in 2010 is \$63.7 billion. At the height of the Iraq war in 2007, there were 962 U.S. and Coalition casualties. According to the Center for Disease Control, during that same year, 5,764 young people ages 10 to 24 in the U.S. were murdered; 84% were killed by firearm. A 2009 study published by the University of Chicago listed 510 murders in Chicago in 2008; 80% involved gunfire; half of these were youth between 10 and 25. 50.2 million Americans lived in food insecure households in 2009. More African Americans are in the correctional system today than were enslaved in 1850 (*The New Jim Crow*, Alexander 2009).

The questions that emerge from these recent statistics are at the core of DePaul's new major in Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies (PAX). How do intrastate and international conflicts arise? What are the origins, causes of, and relationship between conflict, violence and social injustice? How can global, national, regional, local and interpersonal conflicts be avoided? What is the efficacy of nonviolent approaches as an alternative to violence? What do our perceptions about social justice, violence and peace say about our respective cultural values and beliefs?

This newsletter offers an introduction to the role of service learning in guiding students and faculty toward developing answers to the above questions. It is the outcome of a long-term partnership between the Steans Center, Community Service Studies and the PAX program. From its beginnings as a minor, PAX has contained a strong service learning component, including a capstone internship course that engages students in community projects focused on peacebuilding, conflict resolution and the promotion of social justice. As an interdisciplinary bachelor degree program, PAX draws on faculty from across DePaul including many who are themselves engaged in community work. PAX hosts some of the most outstanding service learning instructors at the university. They experiment with new pedagogy that engages students in service and activism and that challenges assumptions about what it means to live in a just society.

In addition to entering graduate programs, PAX majors will enter a variety of fields including law, public and foreign service, politics, social work, and conflict management. Service learning with organizations that emphasize nonviolent solutions to conflict will provide experience from which students build careers and more sustainable, safe communities. Along with them, students will bring a critical understanding of past and present conflicts and social issues as well as conflict resolution skills that can directly contribute to reducing and hopefully ending violence.

[www.steans.depaul.edu](http://www.steans.depaul.edu)

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## Irwin W. Steans Center Nationally Recognized as Leader in Service Learning



DePaul University and the Irwin W. Steans Center were nationally recognized for service learning in which community-based volunteer work is utilized as an instructional strategy.

The exclusive rankings, which are based on categories created by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and evaluated more than 1,400 schools across the country, are available at [www.usnews.com/colleges](http://www.usnews.com/colleges), and were published in the September 2010 issue of U.S. News & World Report.

### Impact on Community

The Steans Center supports 150-200 courses per academic year and numerous internship programs. Each year more than 3000 DePaul students have the opportunity to integrate academic work with service in Chicago communities. Since 2008, the center has shifted its focus toward increasing the quality of service learning implementation, rather than to aggressively expand the number of courses and internship opportunities.

Central to the Center's new strategy is maximizing impact on the communities it serves. In addition to allocating more resources to faculty development and student support, the Center has engaged in systematic measurement of the impact it has on community organizations and the people they serve. In 2009, for example, the Center funded a year-long research fellowship to examine the impact of service learning on community partners in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago.

Further efforts are also being made to recruit faculty and staff interested in providing pro-bono projects that enhance the organizational capacity of DePaul's community partners. For example, the Center is participating in DePaul's Catholic School Council in the School of Education, a consortium of faculty, staff and Catholic school administrators seeking to understand the myriad of ways that the university can channel resources into supporting the sustainability of Catholic schools.

The Steans Center strives to be among the leaders in creating and documenting positive community impact through service learning and other forms of university-community engagement. In addition to fulfilling the institution's Vincentian mission, a truly "community-based" service learning program enhances student academic performance, engages faculty in meaningful forms of scholarship, and contributes to the sustainability of local communities within which a good portion of DePaul students live.



**MISSION STATEMENT:** The Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning provides educational opportunities grounded in Vincentian community values of DePaul students. The Center seeks to develop mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationships with community organizations in order to develop a sense of social agency in our students through enrollment in CbSL courses, community internships and placements, and community-based student employment.

# Third Annual Service Speaks Conference

BY DAN BARON

One spring Saturday morning at DePaul's Student Center senior Matthew Sebastian presented on his work with Invisible Children, a nongovernmental organization seeking to bring home abducted children forced to become soldiers in northern Uganda's civil war. Sebastian, a McCormick Community Intern, was among the many DePaul students who presented at DePaul's Third Annual Service Speaks Conference on May 8, 2010. This was Sebastian's second year presenting at Service Speaks and, after witnessing the conflict in northern Uganda, he noted the difficulties articulating his experiences to young people in the U.S. "What is important is to convey a message of motivation to do something positive, whether in our respective fields or not," Sebastian said.

The Steans Center and Illinois Campus Compact hosted the day-long event, highlighting the service learning work of students, faculty, and community partners. The conference featured keynote speaker Jill Mairn, communications and programs director of the Restavek Foundation, an organization aimed at ending childhood slavery in Haiti through education, advocacy work, and investment. Mairn's presentation addressed the cultural and economic challenges of Haitian society. This year's conference also promoted discussion about the philosophy of service work and addressed critical issues such as prison policy reform, homelessness, immigration, healthcare, and youth justice.

"The conference is an opportunity for students, faculty, and community partners to come together and share their service experience with the wider DePaul community," said DePaul senior Gabrielle Brodsky, the organizer of the event. "It's very motivational to see others engaged in such great work." Annie Columbo, a DePaul senior and McCormick Intern, shared in Brodsky's sentiments. "Hearing about other people's challenges, whether they are similar or different from your own, can be both reassuring and motivating." Columbo, a first-time presenter, facilitated a roundtable discussion on "finding one's niche" in the nonprofit field. "It's a great venue for students to display their achievements and involvement and to share the knowledge they've gained through service work," Columbo stated.

"Service Speaks offers a wonderful forum to share ideas and experiences in service learning—something that is not nearly encouraged enough," Sebastian added. "This year brought in many more community members, and I hope the conference will continue to grow in the coming year so that more people—both from the DePaul community and beyond—will be able to see the wonderful things happening during service learning."





The staff of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a community partner supporting students in the Peace, Justice, and Conflict Studies program (PAX).

### 'Toolbox' for Engaging Conflicts

Professor Ken Butigan, who has taught nine courses in the program, says he has witnessed growing interest in PAX over the years. Butigan's expertise in the subject goes back three decades. Since the early 1980s he's been involved in numerous nonviolent social movements such as the anti-nuclear movement, homeless rights and Central American peace movements. "There has been a revolution in academia in the past twenty years, where colleges and universities have increasingly developed peace, justice and conflict studies programs," says Butigan. "I am seeing many programs that seek to provide students with a vision and toolbox for engaging creatively the conflicts we face every day." He adds that studying these subjects gives students an opportunity to explore critical issues in the world – and in their own lives. "I ask students to keep a critical journal," Butigan says. "I am often struck by the way they are applying what they learn to their own personal relationships, in their families, or with fellow students or co-workers."

### In the Community

Students in Butigan's class this spring worked with eight organizations in the city, including the Brother David Darst Center for Justice & Spiritual Education and Voices for Creative Nonviolence. "I think a lot of young people

are craving opportunities to explore the topics of peace and justice," says Mindy Rueden, Executive Director of the Darst Center, a Chicago-based organization. "I very much appreciate the opportunity to work with the Steans Center and Peace Studies program to get more students in here." DePaul students created brochures, wrote a press release for a local newspaper, worked on the organization's website, and helped organize an awareness-raising event for the Center.

Jeff Leys, Executive Director of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, says he has welcomed DePaul students from at least seven PAX classes to the organization including students from Butigan's classes. During spring 2010, four students performed a variety of jobs. Leys says that staff will sit down with students after they've had a chance to acclimate themselves "and begin to figure out project niches they might be able to work on. For example, this quarter one of the interns did research on the status of health care in Afghanistan – then created a flier and fact sheet. Others have researched the impact of drones used by the U.S. military in Afghanistan and Pakistan." Eventually, the results of DePaul students' work inform campaigns that engage the public in dialogue about war and its impact on local populations.

Rueden and Leys echo each other's thoughts about the benefits of having students at their programs – for the organization as well as the students. Both emphasize the importance of listening to students and their perspectives about the organization's work and challenges. "One of the things we really value is everyone having an equal voice around the table," Rueden says. "We embrace that and include it in how we develop our marketing tools." "Community-based organizations need to be ready to make the commitment to sit down with students when they arrive at their location," adds Leys. "You have to build opportunities for conversations into the experience."

### Students: Major Where "Theoretical Meets Practical"

Recent DePaul graduate Julie Froslan notes, "having a Peace Studies program at a university is really important," say Froslan, who majored in English and minored in Women's and Gender Studies at DePaul. "It helps to depart from the script that says the only way to solve conflict is with a tank. Taking these classes may not change the way you view conflict, but it will help you consider other options."

"For me, the Peace Studies major is where theoretical meets practical," adds Nic Cable, a PAX major. "It's about being conscious and engaged citizens." In an activism class he took

during DePaul's winter quarter, Cable and nine other students created an event on immigrant justice at DePaul for fellow students. The group presented a blend of community and student activists speeches and musical testimony on the immigration issue. More than 250 students and community members stopped by during the three-hour event, which was titled "Love Without Borders: A Celebration of Immigration." Cable helped manage the event, which he says "raised awareness of why DePaul students have a stake in this issue."

For Emily Anderson, being engaged in a wide range of activities and causes has been an essential part of her experience at DePaul. Anderson says she first became "addicted" to the study of peace and social revolution while taking a U.S. history class in high school. Anderson, who graduated in June 2010, says she "had so many phenomenal experiences in service learning through this major."

Her experiences have included attending a world social forum in Brazil, planning a Vincentian youth convocation, and – for her senior capstone project - designing her own nonprofit organization. For this project, she planned a community-based school that promotes service learning. In addition, Anderson and another DePaul student had the opportunity to regularly visit former gang members at Kolbe House, the Catholic jail ministry

of the Archdiocese of Chicago. "We have a nonjudgmental, open-minded dialogue with them about how they got there and what their experiences have been," she says. "They have been grateful to talk with us." Anderson has also conducted a literature review on gangs in Chicago, prison ministries and juvenile incarceration in the United States. She plans to work with incarcerated youth and gangs in Los Angeles.

Anderson says she has learned through her classroom experience at DePaul that she is far from alone in her work. "One of the greatest things I am finding is that this kind of work is more common and important than we hear about. I've gotten a real sense that this kind of activism and service has been going on for years. There's a real community and people who have been doing this work for generations."

Like all college students, PAX majors face the inevitable question about how the subject will apply to their life after graduation. Larrabee, O'Brien and others emphasize the practical nature of the Peace Studies major. "There are many careers connected to or enhanced by this field," O'Brien says. "For example, think about positions at the United Nations or with nongovernmental organizations." Careers may fall into the areas of foreign policy, human rights, social and economic justice, environmental protection, law,



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—Mary Jeanne Larrabee, Ph.D.  
Director, Peace, Justice and  
Conflict Studies.

journalism, government and other areas.

Students may also consider voluntary options with programs and organizations such as the Peace Corps, Amnesty International, Oxfam and many others.

Meanwhile, Ken Butigan says there is a message he likes to share with students in his classes. "I tell them that we have more power than we think," he says. "And here are tools you can use to make change with that power." Or, as Emily Anderson put it, "This degree shows you how you can change whatever you want. You are empowered."



"Love without Borders," an event created by Peace, Justice, and Conflict Studies (PAX) students that focused on immigrant justice through community and student activist speeches and musical testimony.

continued on page 6

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## **OPPORTUNITIES**

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### **McCormick Community Internships - Spring 2011 internships: Deadline Sunday, February 27th, 2011**

DePaul juniors and seniors from any major, design and propose an internship that applies knowledge and skills to benefit a community organization, while simultaneously gaining valuable work experience. Renewable for up to three terms.

### **Community Partners Internships (CPI) – recruiting now!**

DePaul students with federal work study eligibility, apply for one of several CPI internships that offer the opportunity to gain work experience that combines professional development and community involvement.

### **Fourth Annual Service Speaks Conference 2011 SAVE THE DATE – May 11th, 2011**

DePaul students, faculty and community partners present on their service and social justice experiences. Participate in a day-long conference featuring panels, presentations, workshops and posters that reflect the impact of university-community engagement on critical social issues in Chicago and internationally.

### **International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement Annual Conference SAVE THE DATE – November 2nd-4th, 2011 In Chicago**

Research for Impact: Scholarship Advancing Social Change  
CALL FOR PROPOSALS February 1st-April 1st 2011.

For more information, please visit [www.steans.depaul.edu](http://www.steans.depaul.edu)