

PEACE



EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article is the fourth in an occasional series of features about peace and social justice issues in international education. The first article, "Leaving Light Footprints," about sustainability in international education, was published in the May/June 2012 issue; the second article, "Transforming Lives," about refugees, was published in the November/December 2012 issue; the third article, "Intimate Proximity: The Human Face of Genocide," was published in the January/February 2013 issue.*

PATHWAYS

STUDENTS ARE LEARNING

ABOUT MULTIPLE ROUTES

TO BUILDING A MORE

PEACEFUL WORLD.

BY DANA WILKIE



This panoramic view of Ras al Naqab was taken as students on FIE's "Peace and Conflict in the Middle East and Beyond" program traveled to Wadi Rum. From left to right: Paul Arthur, the program director; and students Stephanie Sobek, Elias Okwara, Annum Gulamali, Steve Saunders, Jacyln Doumar, and Suzanne Michaels.

IN SPRING OF 2008, Swarthmore College student Reina Chano drove through the hilly Northern Ireland city of Derry—a key locus of the region’s infamous “Troubles”—and chuckled at her guide’s account of boyhood graffiti pranks, and at his habit of activating the childproof lock on her door as he did for his grandchildren.

The conversational tone shifted dramatically, though, when her new friend confided that he wore a bulletproof vest because there were drug dealers in his impoverished neighborhood, and that a man he’d just introduced to Chano earlier that day had been a paramilitary group sniper.

A junior studying Catholic-Protestant tensions under Swarthmore’s Semester Abroad Northern Ireland program, Chano believed her U.S.-based studies had braced her for the notion that addressing political, ethnic, and religious conflict can be complicated, multifaceted, painstaking, and wrenching.

“It’s an entirely different thing, however, to read about theory and another to directly experience and observe it,” says Chano, now a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania. “It was another thing entirely when I spoke to people whose families had been hurt or killed through the actions of a paramilitary group.”

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The key is to encourage nonviolent conflict so that

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When universities create peacebuilding and conflict-resolution degree programs, book-learning, lectures, and academic research can rarely compete with living in a conflict-torn region and befriending survivors of those conflicts. Whether it’s Swarthmore’s Derry-abroad program, the University of Rhode Island’s summer in Nepal, or the Southeast Europe abroad experience offered by Kosovo’s Universum University College, programs that bring students to regions they’ve only studied from afar can compel those such as Chano to pursue conflict studies in graduate programs, or return to a region with the tools to continue promoting peace.

“I think a lot of people think conflict is inherently bad, or that peace activists abhor conflict,” says Chano, who recently won a \$1,000 grant from the University of Pennsylvania to create “maps” illustrating how Catholics, Protestants, Nationalists, Loyalists, Republicans, Unionists, immigrant groups, the young, and the old view Derry’s historic city center so she can contribute to Derry’s urban revitalization efforts. “We don’t. It’s a necessary and natural part of life to disagree with others. The key is to encourage non-violent conflict so that individuals or groups are able to discuss their differences or disagreements in ways that allow for mutual respect and understanding.”

Denise Crossan, regional director of Swarthmore’s Semester Abroad Northern Ireland program, says students who travel to Derry “often describe feeling out of their depth, unsure of the right answer—rarely the case in their traditional safe home context—having to take control in circumstances where they feel they have minimum information, and taking a risk in their learning journey.”

And that’s a big part of Crossan’s goal.

“We want students to realize the complexity associated with a country moving out of conflict, what people lived through, and the resilience of the local people,” Crossan says. “Most importantly, we want them to know that hearing about what happened firsthand is as important, if not more so, than relying on subjective text books.”

Derry is home to the Battle of the Bogside, widely regarded to have ignited the conflict now known as the Troubles, which erupted in the late 1960s over the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and the relationship between its Protestant unionist community and its Catholic nationalist community. Unionists and loyalists wanted Northern Ireland to remain within the United Kingdom, while Irish nationalists and republicans wanted it to leave the United Kingdom and join a united Ireland. The ethno-nationalist conflict spilled into the Republic of Ireland, England, and mainland Europe, and involved widespread civil unrest and a heavy military presence before ending with the 1998 Belfast “Good Friday” Agreement.

However, sporadic violence has continued since then.



Crossan—whose program requires students intern with a community group, conduct a research project, and finish a reflective journal—introduces the newcomers to Northern Ireland by asking they attend three days of the conflict’s commemoration events. The first time she saw her students after those three days, she says, “I hadn’t anticipated the effect that hearing the stories of Bloody Sunday victims and the legacy of the conflict would have. They seemed exhausted, emotional, reflective, and quiet. They were struggling to put all their thoughts in order and to make sense of what they had heard and experienced.”

One student, Crossan says, described an event where the relatives of victims of 1972’s “Bloody Sunday” talked about that infamous day, in which the British Army shot to death 14 unarmed nationalist civil rights demonstrators in Derry. Relatives described standing beside loved ones when they were shot and experiencing bullets whizzing past. “The student was struck by the manner in which the people told their stories,” Crossan says. “In one moment, people were laughing and making fun and in the next moment, talking about a harrowing circumstance that would bring them to tears remembering the event.”

Andrew VanBuren, a religion major at Swarthmore when he went to Derry in 2008, had a similar

experience. Now 25 and earning a master’s of divinity at New York’s Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, VanBuren recalls that during a 10-minute cab ride, his Derry taxi driver vacillated between discussing a coming football match and the horror of losing his brother during the Troubles.

“I remember Denise saying that as part of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that ended the Troubles, all political prisoners were set free,” VanBuren says. “So now the people who killed your son or your parent or your brother or sister—they were now living down the street from you, and you had to deal with it. The politicians made the agreement, but the people had to live it out. This captured how much any change depends not on the ‘leaders,’ but on the citizens of society. We often call for reform, but how often do we take responsibility for ourselves?”

After graduating from Swarthmore, VanBuren returned to Northern Ireland for a year to volunteer at a Ballycastle peace and reconciliation center where Catholics and Protestants participate in retreats to discuss religious differences. After he earns his divinity degree, he hopes to open a U.S. interfaith retreat center that examines societal issues and “brings together people who would not normally spend time together.”

One of the young adult youth groups Andrew VanBuren worked with in Northern Ireland. This group was made up of young adults from both the Catholic and Protestant communities who came together to petition the government for better mental health services. “It was a good example of people setting aside their differences to work together towards a common goal,” says VanBuren.

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different groups of people can learn about one another

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From London to Amman

Raised in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, Stephanie Sobek had never associated with many people beyond the white, middle-class Christians who populated her hometown of Brunswick. It took a 2006 education abroad program to Seville, Spain—and a new friendship with a Muslim girl named Selma—to make her realize how little she understood about Islam, the Middle East, and the conflicts there.

East. She taught me the very basics of Islam and catalyzed my fascination with the Arab World."

Students start their studies in London, focusing for three weeks on theories of conflict resolution and using as a case study the resolution to the Irish Troubles. They travel to Derry and Belfast to meet with academics and leaders who negotiated the Northern Ireland/UK Good Friday agreement. Sobek, who participated in the program the summer before her senior college year, met with Jonathan Powell, the former chief of staff to then-UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Lord John Thomas Alderdice, former Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly and leader of the politically moderate, Unionist-leaning Alliance Party of Northern Ireland.

Armed with the conflict resolution theories they studied in London, students traveled to Amman, Jordan, where they lived with Jordanian families and spent three weeks studying—not just the Israel-Palestine conflict—but most of the other conflicts in the region, including the Lebanese civil war, the war in Iraq, the conflict in Yemen, border conflicts in Iran and Syria, and inter-tribal conflicts.

Sobek and her colleagues traveled to Petra, Wadi Rum, and the Dead Sea. As in London, they met with political, tribal, and cultural leaders.

The goal?

"One goal is to get past popular beliefs and definitions about a conflict and to learn ways to look at what is actually happening," says Joan E. Gore, senior academic development director for the Foundation for International Education. "We want them to examine conflict that gives them a perspective about every player in the conflict so that they have a more in-depth understanding of what's going on before they begin to prescribe how to resolve it."

Gore says that after their London studies, students go to Amman "with something of a framework for understanding the opportunities, but also the limitations, of conflict theories." They come to understand the complexity of a conflict, she says, as well as the tools required to resolve or manage the conflict.



Student Stephanie Sobek with the Sheikh Abu Jibraayil of the al-Amareen tribe in the South of Jordan. "We met with the al-Amareen tribe to discuss how conflicts are resolved between tribes which are so far removed, geographically and at times culturally, from the modern city centers of Jordan," she says.

Back home at Ohio State University, Sobek decided to major in political science and Middle Eastern studies with a minor in Arabic, and in 2011 participated in the London/Amman Peace and Conflict Resolution in the Middle East program offered through the London-based Foundation for International Education, a nonprofit educational organization, and the America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST), a nonprofit that offers international abroad programs in the Middle East and North Africa.

"I recognized that I, like many Americans, associated Muslims with terrorists after September 11," says Sobek, now a master's student at Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies. "It wasn't until I met Selma that I realized my ignorance of the Middle

“I grew up with the experience in my life as a child that there were many different perspectives and ways of looking at the world,” says Gore, a first-generation American whose father came to the United States as a Jewish refugee during World War II. “One of the goals of this program is to get past the stereotypes that have developed whenever there is conflict in Israel, or Palestine, or the conflict now developing in and around the Syrian situation. In America, we have thoughts about who’s the ‘good guy’ and who’s the ‘bad guy.’ American politics is a good example of this. There’s a different view of Israel and Palestine in the United States that may not have a whole lot to do with what’s actually going on—there on the ground.”

One of Sobek’s most vivid memories was sitting on a red, woolen cushion in a Bedouin tent in south Jordan—passing a small porcelain cup of coffee around a circle of American students.

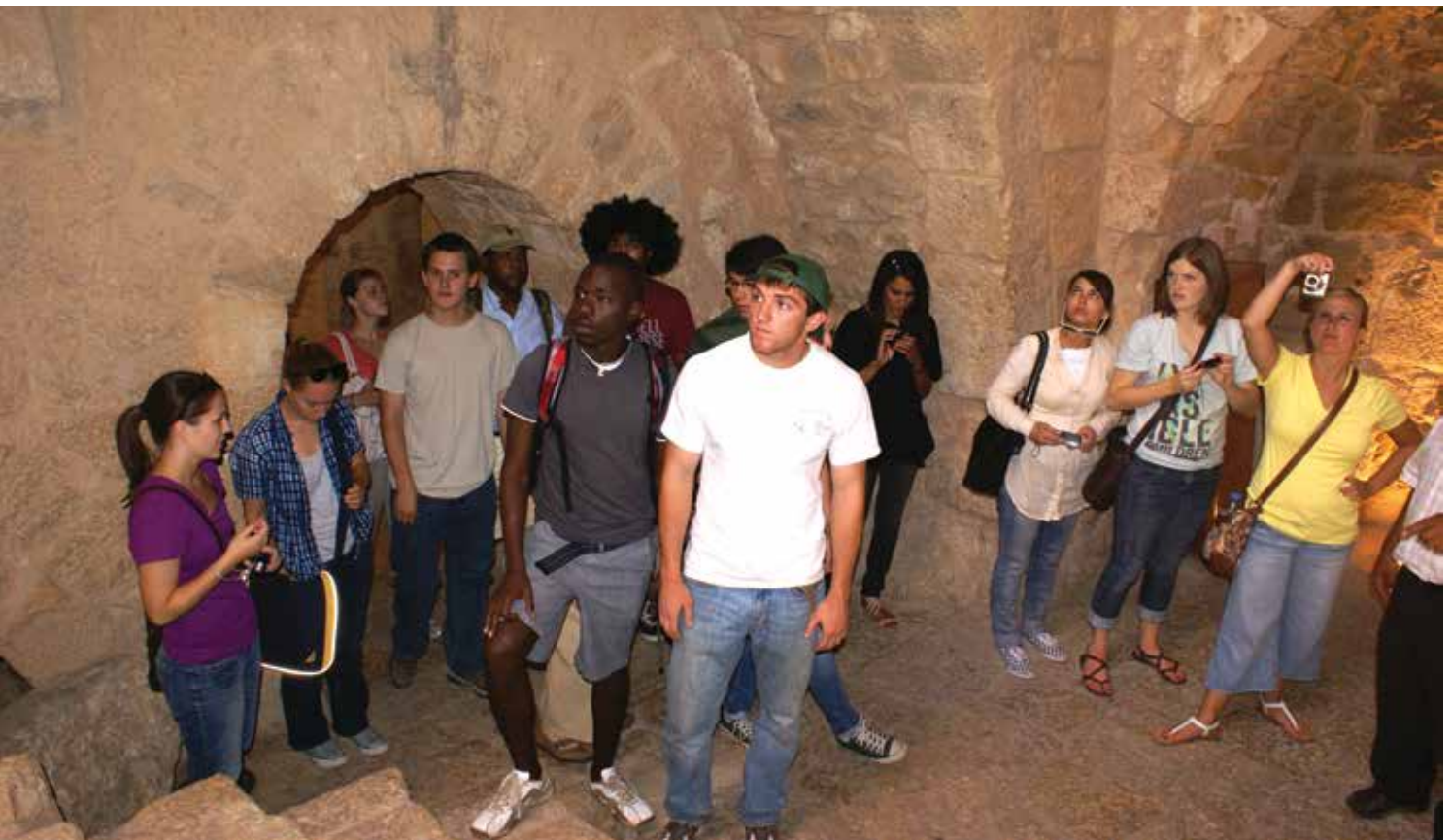
“Once all had been served, the Sheikh of the al-Amareen tribe began to explain the hybrid of tribal, Islamic, and civil law that governs how conflicts are resolved between the tribes,” Sobek says. “I was intrigued when the Sheikh used the Arabic words

‘ard’—meaning ‘land’—and ‘sharaf’—meaning ‘honor’—interchangeably. The Bedouins associate land with honor. Natural resources in the desert are scarce, so land is an integral issue to many tribal conflicts in the country. After spending the day with the al-Amareen tribe, playing with their goats, sharing tea, and discussing politics over hookah, I realized how important it is to engage with local people to really understand a country’s culture, history, and politics.”

Students have the option of remaining in Amman for a 100-hour course in modern standard Arabic and Jordanian Arabic. Scholarships of \$1,000 are available through the London-Amman Summer Study Abroad Scholarship Program.

“Since September 11, 2001, there has been so much hostility between the U.S. and the Middle East, and a lot of times this tension is simply fueled by misunderstanding the other side,” Gore says. “So much of conflict is fueled by a mentality of ‘us versus them’—where one group demonizes the other, but really doesn’t know anything about them. I believe that through positive interactions such as study abroad programs and interfaith dialogues, different groups of

Students explore Ajloun Castle in the North of Jordan, built in 1184, which protected the communication routes between Jordan and Syria.



A Tour to Learn About Conflict Management in the Middle East



Marian Hale

For the past six months, Marian Hale has traveled to Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, and Iraq as part of the University of Haifa's Peace and Conflict Management Program.

The 24-year-old University of Colorado graduate joined the program last October because she saw an opportunity to address "the suffering and hatred that the children" of Middle Eastern conflicts experience.

"Whether it is the pain of a family member in prison, is friend killed in a suicide attack, or hatred toward the people who caused it, these experiences destroy children's innocence," said Hale, who paid \$15,000 for the year-long, master's level program that brings students to

Israel to study peacebuilding efforts through field trips, a 120-hour practicum at a local NGO, and lectures by activists, politicians, diplomats, academics, and former military officials. "It becomes easy to understand why a young man or woman would want to join the army or even become a suicide bomber when it seems there's no other way to fight for justice."

Now in its second year, the program has hosted students from Ukraine, Ghana, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, the United States, Mexico, Israel, China, and Canada. Students study Hebrew and Arabic, write three papers and live in dormitories on the Haifa university campus. Built on Mount Carmel, Haifa's ethnic and religious diversity provide "the perfect backdrop for students from around the globe to come together to learn about conflict and peacemaking," according to the program's literature.

"Peacebuilding is a long, challenging process of trust-building," said Hale, who holds a bachelor's in international affairs and humanities, and who will remain in Haifa through this August. "In a protracted conflict, it is easy to believe that the conflict is insolvable. Someone who was once a neighbor can become the 'other' who, because of her ethnicity, seems violent, illogical, or cruel. This can only be overcome by encouraging interaction between different groups and working for small victories when the large ones seem too far-fetched."

Ultimately, Hale hopes to move to Washington, D.C., to pursue a career in conflict resolution.

"I want to work face-to-face with the people who live in this stressful and sometimes scary situation and to build tools for a peaceful future," Hale said.

people can learn about one another and realize that we're all just people, and often our commonalities are greater than our differences."

Back home, Sobek worked with Gore and school administrators to bring a similar abroad program to Ohio State University. "This program fueled my interest in the Middle East and my desire to learn more about the region's history, language, culture, and politics," Sobek says. "My efforts paid off and Ohio State became a joint-sponsor for the program. I had friends who participated in the program the next year and loved it."

Last March, Sobek traveled to Tunisia to participate in the 2012 USA-Tunisia Youth Debates program, where she represented the United States in academic debates with Tunisian high school and university students. She returned to the region in March 2013 to participate in a Harvard-sponsored education abroad program in Morocco.

The most difficult part of Sobek's London-Amman experience, she says, was security. Sobek was preparing to travel to Jordan in the summer of 2011, only months after the "Arab Spring"—a revolutionary wave of demonstrations, protests, and wars in the Arab world—had swept across the region, creating extreme political instability in many countries. Before going to London for the program, she had planned to travel to Tunisia that summer to teach English, but the program was canceled because of the regional unrest.

As for the London-Amman program, it remained in limbo as the program's administrators monitored

the political situation in Jordan so they could be certain students would be safe traveling there.

"Fortunately, the program was not canceled," Sobek says. "However, keeping security constantly in mind, the other students and I were forbidden to attend political demonstrations. I know this was for our own safety, but as an adventurous academic, I would have loved to get inside the crowds to better gauge and understand the Jordanian perspective on current events."

Another obstacle Sobek encountered upon her return home was the very prejudice that Gore's London-Amman program seeks to challenge.

"I literally had people ask me why I would study about the Middle East, let alone travel there," Sobek says. "They'd say, 'Muslims hate Christians and they all want to blow us up.' Whenever I received such a response, I would ask if they had ever met a Muslim, and they always said 'no.' I would tell them about my trips to Jordan and Tunisia and how the people I met there were so kind and hospitable, or how the food was delicious and the sites were beautiful. I don't know if I changed their ideas, but I at least challenged their preconceived notions about people of different religions and nationalities. Not everyone will be able to travel the world, but I believe those who can should, and they should share their experiences with everyone they meet. This type of peacebuilding may occur on a personal level, but I believe when amplified, it can make a world of difference."

Healing Kosovo

Security is one of Joseph Madden’s top concerns as he recruits students for the Southeast Europe abroad program that Kosovo’s Universum University College will offer for the first time this summer.

During the four- to eight-week program, students will live in the university’s dorms and work at a local NGO, business, or government agency. They will travel southeast Europe to learn about recent ethnic conflicts in the region—in Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Republic of Macedonia in 2001.

“Coming from a small, unknown college in the former war-zone that is the Republic of Kosovo has been difficult to overcome,” says Madden, the university’s international admissions officer. “With our main focus being on recruiting students out of the Western world, and more specifically from the United States, there has been a recurring trend of concerns over safety due to the recent conflict. I think reaching out and spreading any and all information regarding actual life here in Kosovo has been the most effective in helping to overcome the stigmas of war.”

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The Republic of Kosovo is a landlocked country in southeast Europe, surrounded by Serbia to the north and east, and Macedonia and Albania to the south and west. Surrounded by mountains with central plains in the middle, its capital city of Pristina—the largest in Kosovo—is a cosmopolitan place of about half a million residents.

The university’s promotional literature on its abroad program says the goal is to introduce students to the “interdisciplinary-defined notions of ethnicity, nationalism, ethnic conflict, ethnic cleansing, and ethnic reconciliation, and to the political science theories of ethnic conflict and reconciliation.” To that end, the course work explores ethnic conflict using case studies in the region. According to the literature, the abroad experience is designed to bring “the

general theoretical discussion right into the current historical, political, and social context: the Balkans.”

What inspired the university to launch the program?

“There is more to life than what is just in books,” says Madden. “These experiences are perfect complements to textbooks. We hope to remove boundaries and stigmas—stigmas over safety concerns, active fighting, general lack of infrastructure, and a destroyed society can be erased once a student spends any length of time in Pristina. I think there is so little information out there on the Albanian culture as well, and the history of the mixing of the Slavic and Albanian cultures that—studied firsthand—could remove some ‘barriers’ or misconceptions.”

Using case studies, students who participate in Madden’s program examine other ethnic tensions that have yet to escalate to full-blown armed conflicts: those between Serbs and Muslims in Sandjak; between Serbs and Hungarians in Vojvodina; between Serbs and Albanians in the Preshevo Valley; between Albanians and Greeks in Southern Albania;

between Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania; between Bulgarians and Pomaks in Southern Bulgaria; between Albanian Kosovars and Serbs in Kosovo; and between ethnic Montenegrins and Serbs in Montenegro.

The program also examines international players in these conflicts, such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Because the Republic of Kosovo is a relatively small country, meetings with high-level officials are still possible. Students are expected to meet with the presidents and prime ministers of Kosovo, Albania, and Macedonia. They will visit Macedonia, Greece, Albania, and Montenegro, stopping in at NGOs, government agencies, and local businesses.

“There are two aspects of peacebuilding—stopping war and rebuilding afterwards, which are equally important,” says Madden. “I think the latter is sometimes wrongly named or forgotten. Conflict resolution fits the same build. It includes ending wars, but also addressing longlasting tensions between cultures, races, and ethnicities, and a better understanding of history that surrounds this region will help people understand the current conflicts while removing any misconceptions on the actions of players within the recent conflicts.”

Peacebuilding in Nepal

For Eden Kalyanapu, a University of Rhode Island business major, last year's experience in Nepal—arranged by the school's Center for Nonviolence & Peace Studies to address a nation's challenges when emerging from a period of internal conflict—proved to be “a wonderful culture shock.”

The Nepal program, which allows students to work alongside the center's staff as they conduct peace-training projects in the heart of the Himalayan region, was Kalyanapu's first experience abroad. She had always been proud of the equal rights that America afforded women, but never more so than after she arrived in the Nepal capital of Kathmandu.

“The realities were sobering,” Kalyanapu wrote in a university blog. “When I least expected it, my gender was taken into account before my words were even registered—whether it be disregard when answering a question, or inequality at the airport. The female Nepali students often had to be specifically called on to get a word in with their male peers, but when they did, their responses were insightful and steeped with the experience of Nepal's political climate.”

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At the heart of the program is a three-day International Kingian Nonviolence Training Program in the mountain station of Nagarkot, where the U.S. visitors and students from Nepal's Tribhuvan University learn how political and cultural conflicts in Nepal are being resolved using nonviolence principles and practices based on the philosophies of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The training is conducted in collaboration with human rights workers, community volunteers, and NGO staffers from organizations in Nepal, Jammu-Kashmir, India, and Ghana. Speakers include human rights activists and peace advocates from Nepal. Last year, Krishna Pahadi, one of Nepal's leading human rights spokespeople who promotes civil society formation and transitional justice, spoke and monitored discussions with the students. This year's students

expect to visit with Anurada Koirala, founder and director of Maiti Nepal, a program that rescues and rehabilitates women and children who've been victims of sex trafficking, as well as Pushpa Basnet, who founded a home for children who were forced to live in prisons with their convicted parents. They visit the Tibetan Refugee Center to meet with Tibetans who—forced to flee Chinese oppression—traveled across a high Himalayan escape route.

Kalyanapu and her fellow students also visited the ancient city of Bhaktapur, the nearby Kathmandu Valley, and the Chitwan National Park and Wildlife Refuge, the oldest national park in Nepal, where they learned about the challenges of conservation ecology and environmental sustainability facing Nepal.

In March 2013 Paul Bueno de Mesquita, professor in psychology and director of the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies at the university, took 18 students abroad for the same program.

Students participated in community service programs “while experiencing a completely different culture, in one of the world's most remote locations, while participating in nonviolent social transformation.”

“Nepal is still recovering from the overthrow of centuries of monarchy and a corrupt government, followed by civil war with Maoist revolutionary groups,” Bueno de Mesquita says. “Lots of violence, bloodshed, and human rights abuses on both sides.”

For the past four years, the conflict has been on hold as the nation's first democratically elected Constitutional Assembly struggles to create a constitution to define a new government.

“We call this a state of ‘negative peace’—no fighting, but no real harmony and no peaceful sense of community and coexistence among the parties,” Bueno de Mesquita says. “The Nepalis are eager to learn and apply new ways for finding and building peace in their country. So far we have trained about 60 persons. They, in turn, have trained hundreds.”

Funding for students to travel abroad is among the program's biggest obstacles. Some departments and programs on campus help with small scholarships, “but flying to the other side of the planet is expensive—plus there are the trip expenses in country,” Bueno de Mesquita says. “With the economy and rising tuition and college costs, this discourages many. The students are psyched to go. Many more wish they could.” **IE**

DANA WILKIE is a freelance writer in Alexandria, Virginia. Her last story for *IE* was “Intimate Proximity: The Human Face of Genocide,” in the January/February 2013 issue.