

Ellen Zimmerman – CELTSS Funding Proposal

Rationale for and value of the proposed project

Developing globally competent, civically engaged citizens with a focus on human rights, social justice, and peaceful resolution of conflict has become an important objective in systems of higher education around the world. This goal aligns well with the Framingham State University (FSU) vision to create an “...educational environment...dedicated to...ethical citizenship...global stewardship, and public purpose and commitment through an inclusive and collaborative community.”¹ The need for intercultural understanding and respect grows ever more important as students enter an increasingly global work force and as global and societal inequalities provide fertile ground for the growth of xenophobic tendencies that put us all at risk. My years of work with FSU’s Human Rights Action Committee and Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, and as a teacher of anthropology with its guiding principle of cultural relativism, have prepared me well to engage these issues in my classes, institutionally, in the wider community, and in my research.

My goal is to reestablish a strong platform for grappling with peace and justice issues at FSU as a central part of our academic program and with a clearly interdisciplinary and global focus. This proposed project is the beginning of what will be a new line of research that I hope to pursue over the next several years.

Why course-release support is needed:

When I am on sabbatical leave in fall 2017, I plan to travel to India to work with colleagues at University of Hyderabad’s Centre for Human Rights and Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policies. However, before traveling overseas, I need to engage in research on already existing organizations and centers here in the U.S. and in New England in particular. I need to learn about the missions, goals, and modes of operation of existing centers so that in creating our own we do not simply duplicate what another center is already doing. In addition, through in-depth conversations with others engaged in similar projects, I can learn what challenges we are likely to face and how others have met the challenges.

This research will require considerable time, as it will involve travel to meet with people in several parts of New England. The travel will, for the most part, be relatively local, and I can fund that myself, even if some of it is less local. What I cannot do is create the time that will be required. A number of the organizations I intend to visit are affiliated with the UNESCO Coalition for Human Rights organizations, New England, which, in addition to organizations such as Doctors without Borders and Lawyers without Borders, include education institutions such as the Trinity College Human Rights Program, Central Connecticut State University, Eastern Connecticut State University, Hartford Seminary, Suffolk University, Manchester Community College, and University of St. Joseph in Connecticut. The purposes espoused by the coalition align well with the goals I envision for the Center:

¹ “Vision Statement,” Framingham State University. Retrieved 08 September, 2016.
https://www.framingham.edu/Assets/uploads/academics/academic-affairs/_documents/framingham_state_university_mission_statement_and_core_values.pdf

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- Coordinating activities of the various human rights organizations;
- Sharing relevant information about human rights;
- Collaborating in hosting joint educational activities and training sessions;
- Providing avenues for students to pursue their interests in human rights issues;
- Creating a web-site to act as a conveyor belt and information center;
- Developing educational strategies for peaceful resolution of conflicts;
- Facilitating understanding and cooperation between people from different backgrounds.²

The proposed FSU center, however, would be more clearly global and interdisciplinary in its approach and would focus more closely on educational endeavors and opportunities for students and faculty.

Expected outcomes of the work supported by the funding:

I expect this work to have two important outcomes. The first is the establishment, subsequent to my sabbatical leave, of a Center for Human Rights, Social Justice, and Peace and Conflict Studies here at the University, to be funded initially with Academic Affairs support but to quickly move to a self-funded or grant-funded basis. As envisioned, this center will serve as an information resource for students, faculty, and the wider community. It will support programming that aims not only to educate the community but also to engage students, faculty, staff, and the wider community in ways to take action on issues of concern. I expect it to bring in outside experts to speak with the campus community, as well as to facilitate faculty and student exchanges with similar centers in other parts of the world. The Vice President for Academic Affairs has expressed her support for this project.

The second intended outcome is the publication of my own research on issues of peace and justice in scholarly journals such as *Peace and Change: a Journal for Peace Research*, published jointly by the Peace and Justice Studies Association and the Peace History Society (an affiliate of the American History Association), and *The Human Rights Quarterly*, published by Johns Hopkins Press. Both of these peer-reviewed journals, as well as many others, provide forums for international and interdisciplinary discussion and research on peace and justice issues. The first question I plan to investigate is how programs at several New England institutions have affected the level of engagement of students in peace and justice issues, including Western Connecticut's Center for Creativity and Compassion and the Peace Studies program at Clark University. This information will be useful in helping to guide the FSU Center's development. I will seek publication on this topic prior to or upon return from my fall 2017 trip to India.

² UCONN Office of Global Affairs, UNESCO Chair & Institute of Comparative Human Rights, Retrieved 08 September, 2016. <http://unescochair.uconn.edu/projects-4/new-england-coalition/>