

# **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE, PHRC, OF EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY**

**by**

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About eleven years ago, I was speaking with Dr. David Carter, our present Chancellor of Connecticut State University and past President of Eastern, about starting a peace group. As I recall, he said, "Why don't you start such a group, Hope?" So Annette Bradstreet, the former secretary of Sociology, Social Work, and Anthropology, together with some students, started what later became the "Peace and Human Rights Committee," PHRC. Annette had been my assistant advisor to the campus Philosophy Ideas Club, PIC, for nine years, and the few students who joined us were former PIC members. One of the students who was active in that group was Asa O'Brien. In fact, in a few of the first meetings, he and I were the only persons in attendance. Another student from the PIC, who became very active and later helped to draft the first proposal for the Peace and Human Rights Center, was Blerim Rexhaj. He was also a speaker at the Peace Conference which the PHRC organized in the fall of 2002.

A few months after starting PHRC, President Carter and Vice-President Dimitrios Pachis invited me to tea where I met Dr. Charles Prewitt. He is a retired faculty member of Eastern and now teaches courses, part-time, in the Peace and Human Rights Minor Program. Charlie, as the PHRC members call Dr. Prewitt, is one of our staunchest allies and most faithful members. In fact, he started a foundation, "The Virginia and Charles Prewitt Foundation," at Eastern that gives scholarships to students studying peace and human rights. Several scholarships from the foundation have been awarded to our students.

At the aforementioned tea, President Carter and Vice President Pachis told me about a Peace and World Security Conference held each summer that is directed by Michael T. Klare, the Five College Professor of the Program Peace and World Security Studies at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. I have since learned that it was Charlie who told the President and Vice President about the Peace and World Security conference. I attended the conference that summer and another such conference about two years later.

The Peace and World Security conferences had quite an impact on me, and because of ideas gathered there, the PHRC held our first conference. This conference was devoted to issues of human rights. The conference, called "Human Rights," took place on Saturday, February 26, 2000. The PHRC, at that time, included: Professors: Hope Fitz (Philosophy); Stacy Close (History), Imna Arroyo (Visual Arts), Catherine (Katie) Lynch (History), and Anna Kirchmann (History); Staff: Annette Bradstreet; Students: Asa O'Brien, Betsy Lunny, Michael Lunny, Pete Marino, Molly Lynch and Michael Joyce, and an alumnus, Glen Stefaniak. The conference was co-sponsored by the ECSU Peace and Human Rights Committee, the Philosophy Ideas Club and the Dean's Office of the School of Arts and Sciences. Speakers at the conference included: Professor Sumner Twiss, Department Chair of the School of Religion, Brown University, RI;

Professor David Little, Endowed Chair at Harvard University, Department of Religious Studies; (a former senior scholar at the U.D. Institute of Peace, Washington, D. C.); Professor Henry Rosemont, Jr. Professor of Liberal Arts at St. Mary's College of Maryland and Senior Consulting Professor at Fudan University; China; Professor Ann Elizabeth Mayer, Legal Studies, Wharton College, The University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania; Professor Lawrence Little, Department of History, Villanova, University, Pennsylvania.; Thomsa Zinza (a scholarly student who is schizophrenic and wanted to share his views that mental patients need human rights). In addition to these speakers, there were "Break Away" workshops headed by: Professor Celia Anderson, from Eastern, focusing on Ireland; Professor Lawrence Little, focusing on Africa; Professor Catherine (Katie) Lynch focusing on China; and Professor Ann Elizabeth Mayer focusing on the Middle East. Other groups which met were: Student's Concerned with Human Rights; The Native American Campus Club concerned With Native American Issues of Human Rights; The AbiGayle Campus Club focused on Gay and Lesbian Issues of Human Rights; and The Women's Center focused on Women's Rights.

Some time after this Human Rights Conference, Charlie Prewitt called to ask me if we could speak to President Carter about a Peace Institute. I was enthused, so on November 10, 2000, we wrote a letter to Dr. Carter telling him what we envisioned. I remember that in the letter we spoke of Eastern as a future "Beacon of Light" that would be noted on the East Coast as a place where people could study about peace.

After receiving our letter, President Carter invited Charley and me to tea with Vice President Pachis and him. He was very enthused about our idea and anxious to further our efforts towards a Peace and Human Rights Center. In fact, he suggested that we invite L. Eudora Pettigrew, Ph.D. to speak at a banquet that he would hold for her. At the time of the invitation, she was the Chairperson of the International Association of University Presidents, IAUP/ United Nations Commission on Conflict Resolution, Disarmament Education and Peace. She agreed to attend the banquet, and the focus of her talk was on how to form a peace center and to instill peace studies into the curriculum

Following Dr. Pettigrew's suggestions, the committee members immediately began to talk about a proposal for a peace center. The committee had grown quite a bit by this time. Some of the members who were quite active and met regularly included Professors: Charles (Charlie) Prewitt, William (Bill) Salka; Anna Kirchmann; Hope Fitz, Margaret (Maggie) Martin, Robert (Bob) Horrocks, Catherine Lynch, Stacy Close, Gail Gelburd, Andrew (Andy) Nilsson, Mary Kenny, Inna Arroyo, John Kilburn, Calvin Saxton and Dennis Canterbury. Staff included: Ann Fratoni and Robin Shefts. Students who were active included Asa O'Brien, Blerim Rexhaj, Terry Griffin and Jeffrey Scott. At some point in our writing of the proposal, we decided that what we really wanted was a Peace and Human Rights Center because without human rights, there can be no peace.

At the suggestion of Robert (Bob) Horrocks, we wrote a mission statement. However, after Dr. Pettigrew's visit to our university, Bob suggested that we get together at a retreat and write a draft of the proposal for a Peace and Human Rights Center. We did just that. On a Saturday, October 13, 2001, several of us met off campus to begin to write our ideas for a Peace and Human Rights Center. Maggie Martin, assisted by Bob Horrocks, gathered our ideas and began a rough draft of a proposal for the center. They went over our ideas with us at least two times before they wrote what I thought was a great proposal.

On November 9 2002, the PHRC held a peace conference, entitled, "Perspectives in Peace." The funding for the conference came from President David Carter, Vice President

Dimitrios Pachis, Dr. Beverley J. Anderson, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, and Dr. Laura Tordenti, Vice President for Student Affairs. Two years of planning and a great deal of effort, as well as time, were necessary to bring in a number of speakers from different parts of the world to speak at our conference on peace. The members of the PHRC at this time were: Imna Arroyo, Annette Bradstreet; Dennis Canterbury; Stacey Close; Mary Curran; Loretta Forde (a staff member), Hope Fitz; Ann Fratoni; Gail Gelburd; Robert Horrocks Mary Kenny; John Kilburn; Anna Kirchmann; Nicole Krassas; Jamaal Lee (a student); Katie Lynch; Maggie Martin; Eunice Matthews; Joan Meznar; Andrew Nilsson; Charles Prewitt; Blerim Rexhaj; William Salka, Calvin Saxton; Robin Shefts; and Christopher Vasilopoulos. Dr. Pettigrew was the key-note speaker. The other speakers at the conference were Professors: Henry Rosemont (See earlier notation.); Brendan McAllister, Director, Mediation Northern Ireland; Fakhreddin Azimi, Professor of History, University of Connecticut; Michel Klare (See earlier notation.) Manorama Kohli, Professor of Political Science at Panjabi University, Patiala, India; Hope Fitz, Eastern; Bart Gruzalski, Pacific Center for Sustainable Living; Dr Amii Omara-Otunnu, UNESCO Chairholder and Executive Director of the Institute of Comparative Human Rights at the University of Connecticut; Blerim Rexhaj, ECSU alumnus; and Rajiv Malhotra, Director of the Infinity Foundation. Professor William Salka was the moderator. The conference was a great success. A friend of mine, who is a renowned physician in Connecticut and New York said to me, "Hope, if this were in my field, there would have been hundreds more people here." Of course, we did not have room for more people. (Should you like to view some of the talks given by the various speakers, we have a video of the conference.)

Soon after the conference, Dr. Pettigrew asked if the PHRC members would like to present their ideas for a Peace and Human Rights Center at the United Nations. We "jumped at the chance." Professor Bill Salka and I presented a brief account of the work that the PHRC had done on the proposal for a Peace and Human Rights Center. Also attending this event at the United Nations were Professors: Nicole Krassas, who had become an active member the year before, Andy Nilsson, John Kilburn, Maggie Martin and Charlie Prewitt.

We were so pleased with our proposal. However, when we presented it to Vice President Pachis, we were told that "money was tight," and that in order for the Board of Trustees to accept our proposal, we needed to produce a budget that would show that eventually we could be self-sustaining. We did that, but we were told that our budget had to be cut in half. We complied, but still the proposal was not accepted.

Regarding the requirement that we be self-sustaining, we were aware of the importance of identifying and writing to funding institutions in order to solicit funds for our programs, etc. In fact, at least a year prior to the Peace Conference, Ann Fratoni and I, with the help of Professor William (Bill) Salka, worked part of one summer trying to contact national and international funding institutions whom we were told might be interested in funding our peace conference. We did not write a grant because we were not a center, but we did write a letter asking for funds. It was accompanied by a letter from President Carter. Only one funding institution expressed interest in helping us, but we were not chosen at the final "cut."

In order to help us with our efforts regarding a center, around 2004, Vice-President Pachis suggested that we establish a Peace and Human Rights Minor and submit a proposal for the minor to the Curriculum Committee. Several of us worked for over a year on the minor. When it seemed that the proposal was not advancing fast enough, Charlie spoke with President David Carter about receiving additional support from the administration. Shortly thereafter, we received lunches and snacks. In fact, those of us who worked during the summer of 2005, on the

proposal, received lunches whenever we had a meeting. Those who were key in writing this proposal were: Mary Kenny who, with the help of Joan Meznar, wrote an original draft, Charlie Prewitt, Ann Fratoni, Hope Fitz, Nicole Krassas Gail Gelberd, and the student members Adam Brzozowski, Matt Mucci and Jason Taraskiewicz. Others who gave of their valuable time and efforts were Robin Schefts, Maggie Martin, Andy Nilsson, Stacy Close, Bill Salka and Anna Kirchmann. (Katie Lynch was on Sabbatical Leave for a year.)

The proposal for a minor in Peace and Human Rights was accepted by the Curriculum Committee in the spring of 2005. It was presented to the University Senate in the fall of 2005 and accepted. The core course for Peace and Human Rights has been taught several times. In fact, Charlie, who is teaching the course this fall, reports that the class fill each time that it is taught. At last count, I believe there were five minors in Peace and Human Rights Studies.

However, I have had several inquiries of late from students who would like to take the minor.

After the minor became part of the curriculum, Maggie Martin, with the assistance of Nicole Krassas, spearheaded a revision of the proposal for a Peace and Human Rights Center. It was Vice President Pachis who advised the PHRC that the proposal would have to be one that was practical in objective and tone and geared not only to the involvement of students in peace and human rights studies but to their involvement in community service and outreach. The committee members who were active in helping with this project are Professors: Maggie Martin, Nicole Krassas, Hope Fitz, Charlie Prewitt, Gail Gelburd, Katie Lynch, Adam Brzozowski, and Matt Mucci. The proposal was sent to Dean Carmen Cid and Vice President Pachis and now it is in the hands of President Elsa Nunez and Vice President Rhona Free.

In addition to the PHRC members already mentioned, Professor Christopher Vasillopoulos has aided greatly in many of the events that PHRC has organized or sponsored over the years. He has especially been helpful by either taking part in or suggesting speakers for social/political events. In fact, soon after 9/11, Professors Vasillopoulos and Fitz took part in an open session for students who wanted to talk about the Iraq war. (Please see the notation below.) In 2005, Professors Vasillopoulos and Fitz held an "Open Classroom Session" on "Human Rights Issues in Iraq. This was part of the Iraq Perspectives three day event which was spearheaded by Nicole Krassas.

In addition to the conferences on Human Rights and Peace, the PHRC has organized or helped sponsor many other exciting events (to see those, you may click on the link [Past events in our home page](#) please).