

Castleberry Peace Institute University of North Texas FALL 2021 Newsletter



Greetings Friends and Supporters of the Castleberry Peace Institute,

Life has been slowly returning to normal on the campus of the University of North Texas. While many of the challenges we have confronted these last couple of years have not gone away, we are back in person on campus and starting to hold some of the usual talks, conferences and other events that make UNT such a dynamic place to be. There is not nearly so much news to report this year because much of the work we do involves international collaborations, which have been mostly on Zoom! Since 2022 is just around the corner with the prospect of more travel and more in-person collaborative work, there will be much to look forward to in the new year. Here is a review of what we have been able to accomplish in 2021.

The Castleberry Peace Institute's partnership with the Colombian organization, Aulas de Paz, continues to develop and grow. Aulas de Paz promotes community peacebuilding activities and especially reconciliation between former combatants from Colombia's paramilitary organizations, guerilla groups and the populations they victimized. Our study of the factors that influence the successful reintegration of former combatants into society was

recently published by the *European Political Science Review*. We find that while education, job training and other practical skills are very important in keeping former combatants engaged in their new communities, family ties are the most important of all in ensuring successful reintegration.

I am happy to report that CPI's project with the Pontifical Bolivarian University, the Museum of Memory in Altavista, Colombia and the Digital Projects Division of the UNT Library has been completed. Thanks especially to the efforts of Beatriz Aguilar we were able to digitize the museum's collections of newspaper articles, community bulletins, photos and other materials to provide them with a permanent record and searchable database of all their materials. Everyone in the community and the world over will have access to these materials.

Thanks to the efforts of Distinguished Teaching Professor Michael Greig, the Castleberry Peace Institute was able to hold its first in person event since the beginning of the pandemic. On Oct. 15, Christopher Jackson of Georgia State University presented his paper, "Protracted Conflict and Diagonal Linkage: How Foreign States Influence Peace and Political Development in Unrecognized States".



Finally, I note with mixed emotions the retirement of CPI Founding Director, Professor Dave Mason. Dave was our Johnnie Christian Family Peace Professor, a leading scholar of civil wars and an all-around great guy. We are happy he can enjoy retirement and grandchildren, but sad to say goodbye.

Jim Meernik Director, Castleberry Peace Institute

In October of 2021 I was able to travel back to Colombia for the first time in almost two years. I met with community leaders from Altavista, a small community just outside Medellin to discuss the projects CPI is supporting. Below are some pictures of the community garden project, which is growing food for the community and teaching the students about the incredible diversity of fruits, vegetables and other plants that grow here. The Castleberry Peace Institute is proud to support this project as well as the community's Museum of Memory and its efforts to promote tourism in this beautiful part of Colombia. My peace studies students in PSCI 3500 are also learning about these projects and will be providing advice to the community and me about how we can continue to support these projects.



Clockwise from top left: teachers, students and friendly dog in the Altavista community garden; yours truly ready to start doing some planting; teachers and students showing off some of their produce; and Marisol, the community garden project leader .



During my October 2021 visit to Colombia I also worked with Aulas de Paz, a foundation in Medellin that promotes reconciliation between former combatants of Colombia's conflicts and their victims. We are working on peacebuilding projects in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia to help repair damage caused by the conflict. We will focus on finding work and social alternatives for young people, peace education for community leaders, and projects to continue advancing reconciliation.



Clockwise from upper left: A meeting of victims of the paramilitaries and survivors with whom they have reconciled in Medellin at Santo Tomas University; street art by young people who are trying to keep others from joining criminal gangs; representatives of victims groups, former guerillas, former paramilitaries and other community representatives from Barrancabermeja. This was both a reconciliation event and a planning meeting for supporting community peacebuilding activities. Former members of Colombia's armed groups also apologized to representatives of the major union as well as individuals for the harm and violence they engaged in.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:**VIVIAN CASTLEBERRY TRAILBLAZER SCHOLARSHIP WINNER HILLARY SHAH**

Hillary Shah, the winner of the 2020/2021 Vivian Castleberry Trailblazer scholarship for students who want to be leaders in the area of gender, peacebuilding and social justice completed her scholarship project in May, 2021. Hillary's project involved bringing women's hygiene and other critical things to women living in homeless shelters. On the left you can see Hillary with boxes of her supplies, while on the right you can see Hillary and Jim just after the donations were dropped off. Hillary is now working in Washington D.C. at Emily's List.

