

James Meernik, Jacqueline DeMeritt, Kimi King and Melissa McKay

Castleberry Peace Institute

Conflict and Human Security Minor

Department Report Spring, 2026

Student Work

Conflict and Human Security students presented at the March 26 Scholars Day.

Julette Miranda, "Rights, Protections, and Livelihoods: Displaced Women and Children in Colombia" - presentation - Mentor **Kimi King**

Nina Sestan, "Perceptions of Justice: A Comparative Study of Bosnian and Serbian View of the ICTY" - presentation - Mentor **Kimi King**

Bradley Breece: "Conditional Pro-sociality and Violence in Northern Ireland" - Poster - Mentors **Jackie DeMeritt** and **Jim Meernik**

Julia Daniel - "Divided City: The Role of Peace Walls in Perceptions of Security in Post-Conflict Belfast, Northern Ireland" - poster - Mentors **Kimi King**, **Jackie DeMeritt** and **Jim Meernik**

Janiely Garay Barette - "Idea and Reality: Public Attitudes toward Power-Sharing in Northern Ireland"- Poster. Mentors **Jackie DeMeritt**, **Kimi King** and **Jim Meernik**

Spotlight on UNT work at Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies

Catherine Chinchilla presented her paper *Peace Requires Silence: Why Contemporary Peacebuilding is Structurally Incompatible with Liberation* at University of Notre Dame's Student Peace Conference, April 10.

Catarina Rose Bezerra presented her paper *Rethinking Peace from the Global South: Civil Resistance and Decolonial Peace in Colombia* at University of Notre Dame's Student Peace Conference, April 11.

Adriana Garcia has been accepted at the Kroc Institute's Strategic Peacebuilding Academy 2026 (May 26–30). Peace practitioners, scholars, and policy professionals from around the world come together to build practical skills, to share best practices and research innovations, and review emerging trends in sustainable peacebuilding.

Learning Abroad

During Spring Break 2026, **Drs. Jacqueline DeMeritt** and **Jim Meernik** took 5 students (**Julia Daniel, Emma Pramuk, Martin Mejia, Bradley Breece, and Janiely Barette Garay**) to Northern Ireland over to learn more about the history of the conflict known as "the Troubles" (1968-1998) in Northern Ireland. Students visited with many victims from both sides of the conflict, saw the myriads of political murals and "peace walls" of Belfast, and traveled throughout Northern Ireland to learn more about how peacebuilding and reconciliation have been advancing. The Castleberry Peace Institute and the Conflict and Human Security minor provide these spring break and other overseas educational opportunities to students free of charge. In the past we have visited The Hague, Netherlands to learn about international law and tribunals; Colombia to learn more about peacebuilding and reconciliation, and now Northern Ireland. One of the missions of the Conflict and Human Security minor is to provide relevant, real-world experience for students so they are better prepared to understand conflict and peacebuilding and are highly qualified for jobs in these areas.



Research and Remembrance in Northern Ireland. Students in the Conflict and Human Security program are also working with **Drs. King, DeMeritt, and Meernik** to create a memory wall using publicly available videos and other such information to tell the stories of the victims from the “Troubles”. Undergraduate student **Samuel Watts** has been working on this effort and has compiled an extensive spreadsheet cataloguing the attacks on civilians; documentary materials from the BBC archive; and other data information. This is an ongoing project that other students are invited to join (email Jacqueline.DeMeritt@unt.edu).

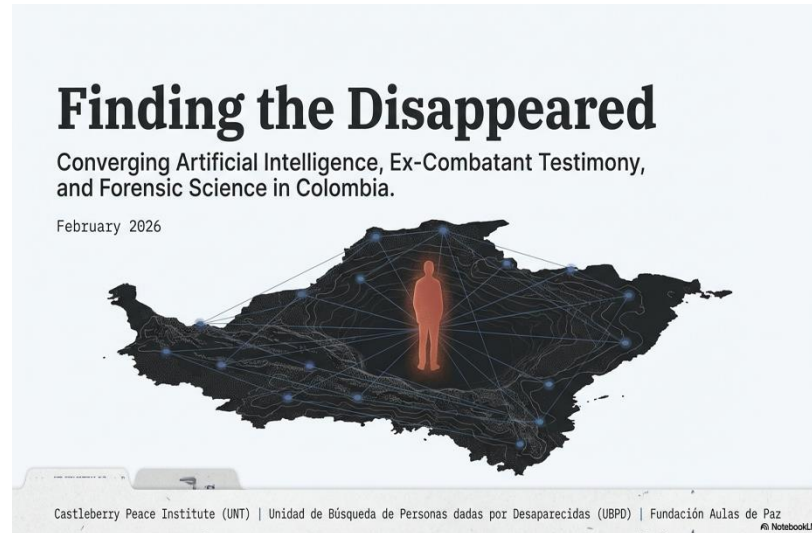
Curriculum about the Arhuaco People. PSCI and Conflict and Human Security students **Bradley Breece, Marlene Meernik, Ray Hernandez, and Kourosch Jalilvand** developed a curriculum on the Arhuaco people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains for use in classes about conflict and human security, the environment, and indigenous peoples. **Drs. DeMeritt and Meernik** met with the Arhuaco leaders, the Mamos, on several occasions to develop this project and record the Arhuaco people in their ancestral homeland of Nabusimake.



Daniel Ryu (TAMS) and Dr. James Meernik co-authored a report on the expansionist activities of the major armed non state actors in Colombia and the threats these activities pose to local populations. The report may be found on the Castleberry Peace Institute and the Conflict and Human Security websites.

Faculty & Graduate Student Work

Dr. Jacqueline DeMeritt presented, “How Criminal Organizations Pursue Legitimacy: Evidence from Medellín Combos”, at the annual meeting of the Latin American Peace Science Society in Bogota. This work is a collaboration between Dr. DeMeritt, CPI Director **Dr. James Meernik**, **Dr. Sanghoon Kim**, and graduate student **Elise Jones** along with **Dr. Gustavo Duncan** at Universidad EAFIT in Medellin and **Juan Camilo Gaviria** of partner organization Aulas de Paz.



The **Castleberry Peace Institute** and our partners in the **Department of Information Technology and Decision Science** in the Ryan College of Business have developed an AI model to assist in the Colombian government’s **Search Unit for the Missing and Disappeared** determine what has happened to the 100,000+ missing persons in Colombia. **Drs. King, DeMeritt and Steve Williamson (RCOB)**

have developed the capacity to not only more precisely determine what happened to these individuals, they are also able to aid the Search Unit in real time when the unit finds additional information that is on the verge of a discovery. Graduate students **Adriana Garcia, Maria Lara, Yesenia Watters**, and **Catherine Chinchilla** are also working on the project.

Professor Kimi King spent April in Colombia as a Fulbright Specialist working at the Pontifical Bolivarian University of Monteria. Her collaborators, Drs. Kate Hernandez Tirado and Daniela Orozco Poveda are examining *Strengthening State Governance and National Security in Colombia: Legal and Administrative Assessment of Sociopolitical Risk Management*. They will present a virtual master class to the Fulbright community May 7 in celebration of the U.S. 250th anniversary with Fulbright Colombia.



UDB FULBRIGHT ICETEX

Reflexiones entorno a la seguridad y el buen gobierno

Conferencia: Human Security and Democratic Governance
Dra. Kimi King

Panel | Defensoría del Pueblo, Personería Municipal, Policía Nacional y la Secretaría de Gobierno y Seguridad Ciudadana de Cereté

Viernes, 24 de abril | 10:00 a.m.
Auditorio San Jerónimo

Ecocampus Monteria

Defensoria del Pueblo Personeria Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana

Visit of Diane and Eric Lebson

Diane and Eric Lebson visited the Conflict and Human Security program April 12-14. **Eric Lebson** spoke to students on April 13 about *Hostage Diplomacy* based on his experiences with hostage negotiations. **Diane** spoke to students on April 14 about the work and roles of non-profits in international affairs (*So, You Want to Do Good in the World? Here's How Working for a Nonprofit Can Help You Reach That Goal*).

Eric Lebson is a former national security official and who now serves as the Chief Strategy Officer of Global Reach, a nonprofit that works to bring home Americans kidnapped or wrongfully detained abroad. His private sector career was in business intelligence and corporate investigations, and his work today is at the intersection of the private sector and national security. Bio: <https://www.reach.global/leaders/eric-lebson>.



Diane Lebson runs a consulting firm where she works with nonprofits to support them on governance, strategic planning, and fundraising. She also teaches nonprofit management to graduate students as a member of the adjunct faculty of the University of Maine's School of Policy and International Affairs. She is also a published author and a member of the Maine Commission for Community Service. Bio: <https://www.evergreenphilanthropy.com/our-team/>.



Continuing to Grow! In Fall 2026, **Dr. Melissa McKay** (UNT Ph.D. 2019) who is currently a Clinical Assistant Professor at UNT-Frisco will be joining the Political Science and INST faculty, and the Castleberry Peace Institute. She has taught everything from the introductory American Government and Conflict and Human Security courses to International Relations and Human Rights. Welcome Dr. McKay!



Dr. Jacqueline DeMeritt, Deputy Director of the Castleberry Peace Institute will be taking over as Acting Director of CPI beginning June 1, 2026 through July, 2027. **Dr. Meernik** will be Distinguished Visiting Professor at the United States Air Force Academy during this period.