



Spring 2025 Newsletter

Greetings everyone! We are trying something new at the Castleberry Peace Institute with this new version of our newsletter. Because there are so many great things happening for our students, with our research projects, and with our partners around the world, we decided to send out these periodic updates by email so you can catch up with all of the news from the Castleberry Peace Institute.

Peacebuilding in Aracataca

The Castleberry Peace Institute has been working for the past year in Aracataca, the birthplace of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Nobel Laureate and author of *100 Years of Solitude*, which is set in Aracataca (Macondo) and was heavily impacted by the conflict. Aracataca was designated as a PDET municipality – areas for special development and peacebuilding. Castleberry is partnering with the Reconciliation Committee Foundation (FCR) and 23 victim groups, community organizations, and members of the regional government. This meeting served as a planning

session where all groups came up with ideas to help Aracataca recover from its violent past. The main interests of the people included telling the stories of the community and recognizing the victims of the conflict, creating a museum and a historic route through Aracataca, building economic capacity for people to regain their livelihoods, and preserving the environment and the indigenous ways of life. We will move forward with several initiatives and compile the ideas in a planning document to put forward.



Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta



In December 2024, the Castleberry Peace Institute was in Nabusimake - Capital of the elder brother, and had the honor of reaching an agreement to work with the Arhuaco people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta - Heart of the World and the United States Institute of Peace to understand the consequences of the conflict in this territory. The Arhuaco people will provide guidance and strategies to deal with the impacts when nature has been declared a victim, which the Special Jurisdiction for Peace of Colombia has ruled in a landmark decision.

Virtual Conference with The Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati

In May, the Castleberry Peace Institute hosted a virtual conference with the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati on language and conflict. In northeast India, where IIT Guwahati is located, there have long been low-level insurgencies and conflicts, as well as many endangered languages. The conference lasted two days hosting a number of speakers and concluding with remarks from Dr Paihi Sakia. Later in June, The CPI had the chance to host Professor Pahi Sakia of the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, again. She presented, via zoom, "Ethnopolitical Conflicts in Northeast India: Understanding Conflict Status and Trajectories".

Updates in Medellín

The Castleberry Peace Institute returned from another visit to Colombia in September 2024. In Medellín, CPI continues to partner with the Pontifical Bolivarian University (UPB) and EAFIT University in Medellín, assisting the Mothers of Candelaria (Madres de la Candelaria), Aulas de Paz, and in Altavista. With the Madres de Candelaria, CPI is continuing their work on archival memory and the applied reconciliation projects, including productive initiatives, witnessing and organizing events, and psychosocial support bringing together community members and those affected by specific violence.

The CPI continues to work with Aulas de Paz to understand gang activity through communication with former gang members and leaders, and supporting primary efforts for witness reconciliation events. The CPI has just published a report on survey data gathered from former gang members on their experiences before and within the gangs in gang-controlled neighborhoods in Medellín. The survey and report help identify policy suggestions that members of those communities believe would help pacify violence. The report is available on the CPI website.

Finally, the Castleberry Peace Institute continues its work in Altavista, a community that has suffered severe violence, heavily affected by gang activity and movement and with other victims groups in Medellín, such as the Women's Market (Mercado de Mujeres) and the Association of

Single Mothers and their children (Asociación de Padres Solteras y Hilando Destinos). Students work with these organizations on the productive initiatives they have developed to support their families and communities.

An amazing week learning about peacebuilding in Medellin, Colombia

Earlier this year, Professors Meernik, DeMeritt and King visited Medellin with an amazing group of students from UNT in March 2024. The visit explored peacebuilding in Colombia and met the people involved in this vital work. We toured Comuna 13, an area transformed from a hotspot of violence to a popular tourist destination where street art is the protagonist. Additionally, we visited our friends in Altavista, on the outskirts of Medellin, to see how they are trying to preserve the memories of their isolated community, which has had a history of conflict. We also learned about their efforts to teach sustainable farming practices for greater self-sufficiency.

On Wednesday, we heard from our partners at Aulas de Paz about our recent survey of current and former gang members and discussed the results regarding prospects for peace. Later, we had the opportunity to talk with a former combatant about his experience in war and peacebuilding. A highlight of the trip was facilitating a meeting between the women from Altavista and the Mothers of the Candelaria. While both groups have experienced the violence and pain of Colombia's armed conflicts, their incredible



resilience and desire to support themselves, their cause, and their community make them truly inspiring.

Recent Visitors in the Human Security Research Series

This past October, we had the pleasure of hosting a visit by Gabriel Rojas-Andrade, the director of restorative justice for USIP's Colombia program and works closely with the Institute's peace processes team. He is an expert in transitional justice with a focus on restorative justice, macro-criminality, international humanitarian law and international criminal law. He held the position of justice coordinator at the International Center for Transitional Justice in Colombia, where he

worked on international criminal law, international humanitarian law and restorative justice standards for the Colombian transitional justice model. Additionally, he advised on macro-criminal investigations in the Special Jurisdiction for Peace in Colombia. He took the time to present to undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty about his work, the past and current conflicts in Colombia, and give a work talk to the graduate students.



Also in October, The CPI hosted the Irish Consul General from Austin, Mr. Robert Hull, to discuss the Irish peace process. He is a representative of the Government of Ireland in Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas. He has worked in the Department of Foreign Affairs since 2008.

Castleberry Peace Institute wins National Science Foundation grant

Professors James Meernik and Jacqueline DeMeritt were awarded a \$93,000 National Science Foundation grant on a project involving the quest for peace in Colombia. Through Castleberry Peace Institute collaborators, Aulas de Paz in Medellin, the top leaders of the major armed organizations in Colombia will be interviewed about their suggestions for bringing peace to Colombia, and about the nature of the criminal gangs and their governance activities. The leaders of these organizations are currently imprisoned at Itagui Prison outside Medellin where they have been taking part in talks with government mediators and other organizations, including Aulas de Paz, about bringing peace to Colombia and disarming all the major criminal organizations.

Faculty Highlight: Dr. Roman Hlatky

Roman Hlatky, an assistant professor in the Political Science department, focuses on the politicization of ethnic identities in Central and Eastern Europe. His interest in his area of study began when he was young, as he grew up in the Czech Republic and witnessed the political climate of the region firsthand. Through his area of research in conjunction with his personal experiences, he studies how political decision-making, opinion-forming, and misinformation factor into why individuals support right-wing nationalism that is present in post-Socialist countries. Specifically considering the influx of anti-Roma sentiments that are deeply ingrained in Central and Eastern European institutions, Hlatky is interested in how tolerance can be bolstered and how these institutions can progress towards distributive justice. His current projects consist of improving attitudes towards marginalized communities with respect to the redistribution of wealth and economic prosperity, especially considering the anti-Roma stereotypes surrounding the need for improved economic conditions within Roma communities, as well as looking at the

language of distributive justice, and how the use of “individual” language and “group” language can change the narrative behind minoritized stereotypes. With the ongoing conflict in Ukraine



and the massive amounts of Ukrainian refugees seeking asylum in Central and Eastern European countries, Hlatky has found that there are economically-driven increases in the right-wing politicization of refugees, and continues to study how increasing economic security for all parties involved would increase tolerance for the crisis at hand. The importance of human security is ever important as the war in Ukraine progresses, and Roman Hlatky’s work in the scope of ethnic identity, intergroup prejudice, and international integration is evidence of this.

Córdoba, Colombia

In Córdoba, The CPI continues to work with UPB Monteria, promoting collaborative work on the development of the Colombian female identity over the course of the civil war. This research hopes to understand what being a woman meant before, during, and after war, and how the war changed or challenged that identity. The CPI is pursuing this research with the help of former female military, paramilitary, and FARC combatants. This research has also increased interest in understanding Colombian intersectionality and inclusive and equitable policy creation.

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- Check out our website for more news updates (castleberry.unt.edu)
 - Follow us on social media on Facebook and @castleberrypeace on Instagram
 - Stay tuned for emails about visiting speakers to hear more about The CPI’s partners and projects
 - If you are interested in getting involved with The Castleberry Peace Institute, please reach out to to Dr. James Meernik (@James.Meernik@unt.edu)

The Castleberry Peace Institute, founded in 2010, aims to support cutting-edge research and education on the causes of war and peace. In order to build and sustain peace, we aim to cultivate democracy, human rights, and economic development through research and experience. The Castleberry Peace Institute promotes a holistic approach to this scholarship towards understanding and promoting peace, reconciliation, and conflict resolution.

