

Next Steps

I envision several next steps in the development of my teaching and research agenda on contemporary slavery. The first step is to continue a series of discussions on and off campus concerning where the work on human rights should be headed. We need more buy-in and consensus before institutionalizing any big changes, such as creating a major or minor on human rights. This may take at least several more years. Second, in the meantime, it is important to offer more classes on issues related to human rights as student demand for such courses grows substantially. Finally, it is important to be open to unexpected changes, given the fluidity of the contemporary anti-slavery movement. With high-tech giants like Microsoft and Google plunging into the antislavery discussion, national, regional, or even global attention on contemporary slavery may quicken in a manner that prior generations of activists could not foresee. We are at the beginning of something big.

From Globe Trotter to Global Citizen: Researching Human Rights Through International Programs

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During May and June of 2010, I spent a lot of time on Swiss trains. I was the visiting faculty member for Pepperdine University's summer study abroad program in Lausanne, which put me just a short train ride away from the United Nations Library in Geneva. I seized on this fortuitous geography both to dive back into my research on the global expansion of human rights and to invite a student along for the journey.

I had successfully applied for an internal grant to conduct a summer project with Elena Juarez, a Pepperdine political science student who was participating in the Lausanne program. I was interested in the role of global institutions in spreading human-rights discourse and practices to individual nations. As a comparative historical sociologist, I was also confident that the United Nations Library would be an excellent site for research. Before we left for Switzerland, I invited Elena to develop a rationale for which type of human rights to study and which country would provide a compelling case study. She chose the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the

Child and its implementation in Cameroon. That summer, we made the trek to Geneva together six times, and we have been invited to revise and resubmit the paper that resulted from our work for publication. As the project evolved, I learned two broad lessons about the benefits and challenges of researching human rights in the context of studying abroad.

Lesson #1: Careful planning and spontaneous exploration are equally valuable.

Among the greatest challenges of conducting research abroad, for undergraduates and seasoned scholars alike, are the realities that there are substantial time limits on the research and that it is not easy to return for further work. Thus important planning must be done prior to the trip to distinguish between what must be done on site and what can be done on the home campus. For our project, planning involved familiarizing ourselves with how to gain access to the library, search the catalogue, and request materials. While at the library, we prioritized our work by checking on whether an item was available online or through Pepperdine's library, and then taking copious notes and making copies of all other potentially relevant materials. The vast majority of the paper was written after we returned to California. Such strategic research decisions would be still more pressing—and possibly require even more planning—for different methodologies in which data collection or analysis must be done on site.

As with any trip, however, the value of sightseeing and detours cannot be overstated. The benefit of conducting research at the United Nations Library—aside from enjoying the beautiful marble building and watching peacocks roam the grounds—was the ability to wander through the collections of books, magazines, and conference proceedings. We took time to simply peruse the books stacked near where our materials were located, to see what other topics were shelved in close proximity to children's rights, international treaties, and Cameroon. The library had prepared guides to certain topics, which helped us understand how the United Nations staff might look at these topics from a different perspective. Taking the detours allowed us to discover more than we expected.

Lesson #2: Some things cannot be learned from the comforts of home.

There is much that we can teach our students about human rights through textbooks, lectures, and the World Wide Web. We can easily trace the historical development of human rights treaties, identify the actors involved with protecting rights, and discuss which factors improve or worsen the daily lives of individuals around the globe. Yet there are intangible lessons that can only be learned "on the ground." For my student and me, our view of the United Nations would have been cartoonish without seeing the endless rows of books and pouring over the detailed meeting proceedings. The bureaucracy of the U.N. would have been abstract without the hassle of applying for library access. We might have underestimated the gap between those charged with protecting human-rights and those needing protection if we had not eaten lunch in the cafeteria next to U.N. staff and delegates. In short, conducting research on human rights in this international context gave us an understanding of what the framework for protecting human rights looks like from the inside.

Yet for those of us interested in studying human rights, there is a still more valuable—albeit elusive—lesson that we hope to impart on our students: what it means to be a global citizen. Promoting human rights is a critical undertaking, but that challenge can also



Elena Juarez Theisner taking notes at the United Nations Library in Geneva.

seem distant from students' daily lives. It is one thing for young scholars to affirm that all people should be guaranteed human rights, but it is something else entirely for them to see themselves as part of that human endeavor, wrapped up in a common fate, and to feel empathy for those who lack clean water or freedom of speech. By facilitating student research on such important topics while the students are living in new environments, travelling far outside their comfort zones, professors can foster that synergistic moment when students redefine themselves. My student, Elena, had taken an earlier trip to Africa during which she realized the importance of empowering individuals to help their own communities; our trips to Geneva helped her grasp the grand enterprise of world aid that too rarely reaches those on the ground. In her words, "When you go, you learn."

Today's undergraduates have unprecedented opportunities to travel and study abroad. The number of students participating in international programs has grown, as has the number and diversity of destinations. Such opportunities are undeniably still a luxury, but we should seize them nonetheless, encouraging our students to go and to learn.

Undergraduates, Faculty Mentors, and Professional Disciplinary Societies Address Climate Change as a Global Human-Rights Issue

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Climate change ranks among the greatest human-rights issues now and for future generations. The United Nations Human Rights Council has expressed concern "that climate change poses an immediate and far-reaching threat to people and communities around the world" and has recognized the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the "comprehensive global framework to deal with climate change issues." The ultimate aim of the UNFCCC is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations "at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system ... within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened, and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner" (UNFCCC 2013, http://unfccc.int/essential_background/convention/items/6036.php). Negotiations to achieve such goals through legally binding multilateral agreements take place at the U.N.'s annual Conference of the Parties (COP).

For the past several years, students and faculty representing Moravian College, York College, and the American Chemical Society (ACS) have attended the COP meetings as official civil-society observers or with press credentials. These participants have gained a deeper understanding of science, sustainability, economic equity, social justice, and the difficulties involved in developing multilateral policy. Although people from many nations comprehend the gravity of the situation, the dearth of understanding of the complexity and urgency of global climate issues in the United States continues to thwart any real progress in national or international policy. It is our hope that by engaging in research and disseminating the results, students and faculty can help to counter the U.S. public's denial or lack of understanding of the scientific underpinnings of climate

change. National consensus on this issue is critical for meaningful policy to be adopted (Ding et al. 2011).

Prior to attending the international meetings, students conduct significant background research focusing on the UNFCCC process and relevant U.S. initiatives. For example, students representing the ACS meet at the national headquarters in Washington, D.C. with ACS staff from the Office of Public Affairs and then travel to Capitol Hill for off-the-record meetings with legislative staff involved with environmental affairs, including climate change. One student spent a day at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Climate Program Office, meeting with its manager of the international programs, to investigate the U.S. government's policy position on climate change. Two other students met with Peter Tans, a senior research scientist at NOAA's Earth System Research Laboratory in Boulder, Colorado. Another student interviewed ACS President Bassam Shakhashiri about the society's Public Policy Statement on Climate Change, the ACS Climate Science Toolkit, and other documents. The information gleaned is shared in blog posts and on the ACS policy website (see <http://www.studentsonclimatechange.com/cop18-student-participants.html>).

The COP meetings go beyond being a fascinating learning experience; the conferences serve as an international multidisciplinary laboratory. Students interact with individuals from around the world, ranging from other youths attending as observers to high-ranking ministers, and with negotiators from the 195 U.N. member states that are parties to the UNFCCC. They gather data and information while attending interactive sessions run by governments, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The students have interviewed negotiators, government officials, representatives from indigenous cultures, and youth from a multitude of countries to gather stories on how people around the globe are impacted by climate change, to identify which issues are of critical importance for the negotiations, and to learn why some individuals are driven to activism. Students learn first-hand how the disparate impact of



Faculty mentors and students at COP18 in Doha, Qatar, December 2012, from left to right: Gregory Foy, Keith Peterman, Nikki DeLuca, Marla Bianca, John Siller, and Parker McCrary. (Photo Credit: Diane Husic)