

# Valencia College Peace and Justice Initiative



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*All People, All Voices, All Matter: Making a difference by intentionally engaging in practices and principles that explore, advocate, and honor the dignity of self, others, and the earth.*

### The Peace and Justice Initiative seeks to:

- 1) Create and teach a Peace Studies curriculum
- 2) Sponsor Peace and Justice co-curricular activities
- 3) Foster a connection to Valencia's A.S./Technical programs in conflict transformation work
- 4) Offer community outreach in Peace and Justice
- 5) Engage in realizing Valencia's Core Competencies, especially Value



**All People, All Voices, All Matter.** The tagline of the Initiative speaks volumes. How do we nurture an inclusive, caring, respectful community of learning where all people feel welcome and heard? This newsletter shares stories and pictures from the spring semester that speak to these goals. The week-long *Conversation on Compassion*, dialogues through retreat and Café Conversations, service projects, peace courses, and our *Principles for How We Treat Each Other* are the means of supporting the mission of the Peace and Justice Initiative. Enjoy!

### Peace and Justice Initiative

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YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/VCPJI>

**PAST EVENTS**

**Valencia's *Conversation on Compassion* Sparks Reflection**



The [Peace and Justice Initiative](#) opened its *Conversation on Compassion* events in January with reading circles that focused on Karen Armstrong's book, [Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life](#), which urges readers to start with learning about compassion and end with loving one's enemies.

Three campuses hosted reading circles on Armstrong's book, and students reflected on their discussions with comments such as, "I felt the book was very enlightening," and "I have learned that compassion is lost in all aspects of life in today's time.... we are constantly on the go, constantly trying to meet schedules, deadlines, bills, that we forget who we are, our purpose and how to be compassionate. We need to slow down, take a deep breath and enjoy what life has to offer."

Workshops were also held throughout the week of January 23-26, focusing on topics such as listening, the relevance of religion, and the power of forgiveness. These workshops were led by Valencia faculty and staff

and were filled to capacity each day. According to Rachel Allen, coordinator of the Peace and Justice Initiative, students who attended described the workshops as "powerful," "engaging," and "insightful."

Two highlights of the week included a keynote address by Dr. Bernice King, daughter of the famous Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a film screening on the documentary *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, which was followed by a discussion from Agnes Umunna, a Liberian author and radio host.

King's speech focused on a message that encouraged students and employees to "raise the standard" and take on society's biggest challenge – complacency. Umunna spent three days on the Osceola and West Campuses working with classes, visiting with faculty and staff, and leading a post-film question and answer session. She brought the topic of reconciliation and truth telling to the forefront through descriptions of her work with women and child soldiers in post war-torn Liberia.

Programming of this magnitude required the support of many people throughout the college. These events were made possible with the help of over 50 volunteers from campus clubs and classes, including members of GSA, MSA, Valencia Future Educators, Bridges, and HEROS (see [Featured Colleague – Subhas Rampersaud](#)).

The Peace and Justice Initiative would also like to express gratitude for faculty support and our colleagues in student development, custodial services, word processing, marketing and strategic communications, audio visual, Cabin Creek Catering, the bookstores, libraries, digital media, organizational communication and development, and the campus presidents' offices.

"Compassion begins at home," Rachel said, "and we are grateful to be members of compassionate campuses!" The *Conversation on Compassion* events were an extension of the Peace and Justice Initiative's discussions held last year on the science of nonviolence.

This article first appeared in the [Valencia Grove](#).

**Images from the Conversation on Compassion**

Over 1400 students, faculty and staff participated in these college-wide events, including workshops, speakers, reading circles and film.



**The Learning Circle:  
12 Steps to a Compassionate Life**

This past year many of us in the Peace and Justice Initiative read many books that have not only opened our minds but our hearts. For me, the [\*Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life\*](#) by Karen Armstrong has done both! After I got my hands on this book and began to realize what it was doing for me, I knew I needed to share this rich conversation with others. I wanted to share not only what I learned, but also how it opened my heart to what our world is missing: compassion for others. Therefore, I started Learning Circle with six members of the Valencia family in the spring of 2012. My purpose was to open their hearts and minds to compassion, and explore how we as educators can use compassion as we lead our students on their educational journey. With the blessing and guidance of Rachel Allen, the Learning Circle of Compassion began and developed into a wondrous and exciting experience.

Upon completing a mission statement and list of learning outcomes, I found that one of my goals was to figure out how this book could go from a conversation about compassion to a learning lesson for the group. In turn, I wanted to encourage the group to incorporate what they learned into a classroom lesson for their students. Through the process of self-reflection journals, many hours of discussions, a little crying and creative picture making, the group came to understand and acknowledge the true meaning of self-compassion, which leads to compassion for others. And as Karen Armstrong states, “this book is a wish for a better world, to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings - even those regarded as enemies...Rooted in principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries.”

We have only begun our journey! Stay tuned for personal stories from the members of this group, sharing how they have extended knowledge to their students. Stay well, be happy and remember: compassion is to be shared, so share with others your compassion.

*Contributed by Gloria Hines,  
West Campus Counselor*



**Charter for Compassion**

**The principle of compassion** lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of or fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

**It is also necessary** in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

**We therefore call upon all men and women** ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

**We urgently need** to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

**Women Behind Liberia's Peace Movement Inspire Students and Faculty**

The scenes were heartbreaking. Little boys carrying guns, bragging about how many people they'd killed. Children on crutches, missing limbs that had been chopped off by soldiers. Women recounting how their husbands were killed and their daughters raped by soldiers. All were victims of a civil war that raged in Liberia for 14 years. The war engulfed the nation and destroyed families — until ordinary women banded together to demand peace.

More than 150 students, faculty and members of the public gathered at Valencia's West Campus on Jan. 26 to watch and discuss [\*Pray the Devil Back to Hell\*](#), an award-winning documentary that tells the gripping account of a brave group of women whose sit-ins and demonstrations finally led to peace for their war-torn country.

The leader of that movement, Leymah Roberts Gbowee, was one of the three women who won the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. Gbowee helped organize the women's Mass Action Campaign, which started in one community and spread to over 50 communities across Liberia. They dressed in white T-shirts and white headbands and confronted warlords, demanding peace. They sat in the sun and rain in markets and on the sides of roads, demanding that leaders listen.

When peace talks in nearby Ghana stalled, the women protesters surrounded the building, linking arms and refusing to let the different parties leave until they hammered out an agreement. Finally, after more than two years of protests, President Charles Taylor was exiled and the West African nation elected a new president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female president in Africa.

The one-hour documentary, which has won a string of awards at film festivals around the world, is an uplifting look at how ordinary people can band together to change the world.

After watching the 60-minute documentary, students and members of the public participated in a discussion led by Agnes Kamara-Umunna, a Liberian radio host and author of the book, "And Still Peace Did Not Come: A Memoir of Reconciliation."



*Agnes Umunna speaks to faculty and staff about Liberia's history and her work.*



*The HERO Club hosts Agnes Umunna on West Campus*

In Liberia, she works with the child soldiers who were co-opted to fight in the war — but who have been rejected by their families and much of Liberian society. They are victims too, said Umunna.

Many now live on the streets of Monrovia, homeless, doing drugs and drinking alcohol, though Umunna has built a center in Monrovia, Liberia's capital, to help them. "I talk to them, one-on-one," she told the audience. "It's hard... Because these kids are ex-fighters, nobody wants to donate money to help them."

Although Liberia has made progress, she warned the audience that the peace there is fragile. "We are sitting on a time bomb right now. There is real tension between the presidential candidates," Umunna said. (Because no candidate received a majority of the votes in the presidential election held in October, a run-off election was held in November — and president Sirleaf won the runoff, but the results have been contested by her opponent.)

For audience members, the film was touching and inspiring. "These women were heroes," said Valencia student Juanita Islam. "I don't know if I could have done that." But the discussion, and the failure of the West to intervene in a war that ravaged the country, was eye-opening to many. "We say that Hitler and Stalin and Mussolini could not happen today," said Valencia student Kris Boodoram, "but why didn't anyone stop these men (in Liberia)? This happened in this millennium."

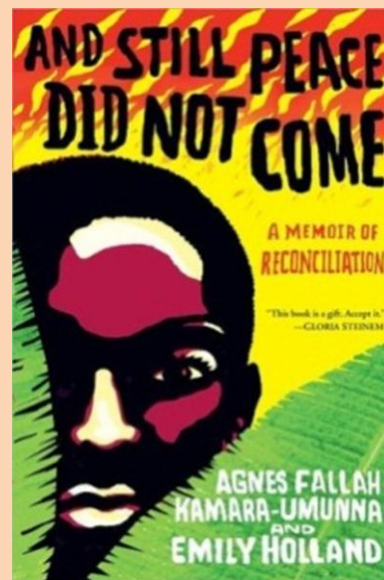
The event was sponsored by Valencia's Peace and Justice Initiative, the Global Peace Film Festival and the West Campus Human Empathy & Rights Organization.

This article first appeared on the [Valencia News website](#).



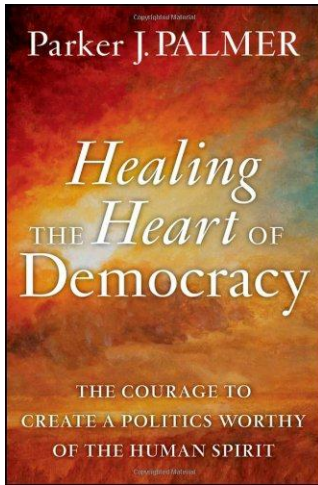
**Guest Author and Radio Host, Agnes Umunna Visits Valencia**

Agnes Umunna, Liberian author of [And Still Peace Did Not Come](#) spent two days at Valencia working with students at Osceola and West Campus. She met with the Peace Studies class, spoke at an open forum, met with the Bridges Group, a journalism class and led the Q & A for the featured film, *Pray the Devil Back To Hell*. The film event was co-sponsored by our local [Global Peace Film Festival](#).



*Agnes Umunna and the cover of her book.*

***Living with an Open Heart:***  
**Faculty and Staff Spring Workshop**



*Pictured: Karen Conn, Jim Belcher, Karen Cowden, Pam Lapinski, Gloria Hines, Harry Coverston, Elaine Sullivan, Mollie McLaughlin, Debi Jakubcin, Amy Love, Kitty Harkleroad, Liz Jusino, Eli Solis, Rachel Luce-Hitt, Yasmeen Qadri, Christine Luong, Lauri Lott, Rachel Allen*

**Below are reflections from workshop participants:**

*This workshop took the ideas and ideals associated with community support and appreciating diversity and made them tangible working realities.*

*This workshop helped me to refocus and hone in on what is really important to me as a person, and how I can implement that into my work.*

*The students will benefit from my example of leading with compassion and passion.*

*I have an enhanced perspective of how the Peace and Justice Initiative is an essential part of every department in the college.*

*The integration of scholarly understandings with illustrative stories is very helpful in connecting the ideas. The use of music, art and literature was a very effective way of connecting, as well.*

*I didn't think nursing had anything to do with Peace and Justice; I learned it does: dealing with students, diverse cultures and learning styles, dealing with hospitals, staff and patients, conflict management, diversity and ethics. By learning more about others I learned more about myself.*

*In my role as a professor, I know it is imperative to speak the truth and allow space for my students to speak their truth. Having this model for me to draw upon in designing lesson plans will allow my students opportunities to treat each other with more tolerance in a changing world.*

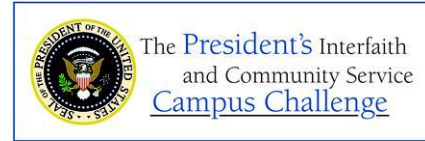


Faculty and staff came together for a two-day workshop titled, "Living with an Open Heart," based on the new book by [Parker J. Palmer](#). The workshop was led by nationally recognized facilitator Elaine Sullivan who comes to us from the [Center for Renewal and Wholeness in Higher Education](#).

**Images from the spring faculty and staff workshop:**



**Valencia Hosts White House Initiative**



Valencia College was proud to host representatives from the White House, Stetson College, Bethune-Cookman University, and Seminole State College for a forum about the [President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge](#). The audience learned about the work taking place on local college campuses concerning interfaith and community service work. To learn more about the White House Initiative visit this [link](#).



*Pictured: Valencia Professor Paul Chapman, Director of the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida Pam Kancher, and Executive Director of the Interfaith Council of Central Florida, Jim Coffin.*



*Seminole State College Professor Bassem H. Chaaban.*



### Our Café Conversation on Race

Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, "Racial understanding is not something we find, but something that we must create. Through education, we seek to change attitudes."

On Wednesday, April 18, 2012 the Peace and Justice Initiative explored the issue of race by hosting a "Café Conversation on Race." Apprehension arose from sheer anticipation as students formed in random groups of four to five people and conversed on the issues of race. Many students had never met before and were from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds. Their challenge was to share different issues of race from their lives. PJI member Hank Van Putten facilitated the conversation.

*Hearing some of the stories from the people in the class was eye opening to me. After the discussion I became aware of how much racism is still a problem in the United States... The discussion was a great experience because no one was scared to say something that sounded racist. There was an understanding in the room that what was said there stayed there and everyone could be open and share experiences that they had with race issues and people discriminating against them... Over all it was an experience that I will remember. A lot of things were shared that were very personal, deep and emotional and made me realize that you truly cannot judge a book by its cover.*

### Below are student reflections from the Café Conversation on Race

*For me, talking about race is nothing new. I'm constantly being asked "what" I am or where I came from... Someone mentioned that being sent hateful messages as a child by your peers was even worse than incidences in older adolescence...Professor Allen went over some discussion rules to keep the discussion on such a sensitive topic as peaceful as possible. What stuck out to me was a technique she mentioned to avoid anger at an opinion with which you don't agree. She said that instead of flaring up, "turn to wonder"... Instead of discrediting a person's logic or insulting their background, they should be listened to and understood. In order to grow, one must be able to understand and accept others differences. I feel the Café discussion was a success...a platform like this is essential to educating and motivating people to make a difference in the bigger world.*

*I would have never thought that race was such a big issue... I am bi-racial and being a part of two different races means that we do not segregate as much as people from a single race. As for the Trayvon Martin case that is currently taking place today, I do believe that race is a factor in the result of his death but another factor was poor judgment.*

*I did not realize when I was younger how Latino Americans were a different race from me. Since I saw them as "white" I thought I could make stereotypes because I was the same as them... I learned how to responsibly and kindly discuss some of the most uncomfortable topics with people of different races and ethnicities...I will remember having this class for the rest of my life. All students should sit through a similar exercise, and maybe then we can break the cycle of ignorance, and racism.*

*Racism is one of the most controversial and touchy subjects anyone can bring up in a conversation... There were many things that I myself as a foreigner felt very emotional about. I never thought I could be in a group of strangers telling them about my past. Growing up in America, not speaking English, and being from Africa was one of the hardest things I've ever had to go through, I felt so uncomfortable with everyone during that time. So while we were having that discussion it kind of brought back some of those emotions.*

Students went on to express that the dialogue on race should take place more frequently and in more places, like in our communities, houses of worship, schools, and throughout the world. Despite the fact that the topic is very tough to deal with, they found it inspirational and thought provoking.


**PEACE STUDIES CURRICULUM**

**PAX 1000: Introduction to Peace Studies**

Introduction to Peace Studies: PAX 1000 is offered on three campuses this fall, with Winter Park campus coming on board in the spring. Look for the second Peace Studies course in conflict transformation coming soon.

Introduction to Peace Studies is a study of peace in its philosophical, religious, literary, historical and other cultural contexts. The course includes investigation into the causes of violence on the global and personal levels, and an emphasis on the interdisciplinary study of peace and the peace movement in historical and contemporary views. Application of conflict resolution, nonviolence, and other practices necessary to become more powerful and peaceful members of our world are also taught in the course.

## PEACE STUDIES



Study the great men and women of peace, learn the practices of nonviolence and become a more conscious and peaceful member of our world.

**Register for PAX 1000**

|                        |     |                |                                |
|------------------------|-----|----------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Fall Semester:</b>  |     |                |                                |
| <b>East Campus:</b>    | M/W | 2:30-3:45 PM   | <b>Professor Eli Solis</b>     |
| <b>West Campus:</b>    | T/R | 10:00-11:15 AM | <b>Professor Cass O'Little</b> |
| <b>Osceola Campus:</b> | M/W | 10:30-11:45 AM | <b>Professor Paul Chapman</b>  |

**Bringing the Principles into the Classroom:  
A Faculty Perspective**

One of my recent favorite additions to the classroom has been inspired by my involvement with Valencia's Peace & Justice Initiative. PJI has developed [13 "Principles for How We Treat Each Other,"](#) and these principles provide a rich framework for dialogue with students about how we build community through our communication behaviors. They also align beautifully with what I see as one of our most challenging core competencies at Valencia, which is Value, which asks that we identify, express, and commit to our values. With the help of these simple guidelines, the students and I are able to build a stronger learning environment that's rich with the values of respect, civility, and empathy, as well as providing clear practices for communication competency in the classroom.

When I introduce the principles in class, every student gets a copy and they take turns volunteering to read them aloud. I ask them to pick out a few that seem especially important to them and to silently consider why they have chosen the principles. If they have an experience related to any of the principles, they are encouraged to recall these. After a short time to reflect, I ask students to share their most valued principle and, if they'd like, to describe a time when they experienced the principle in action or needed but didn't receive it. We are able then to discuss how often undervalued, and yet so impactful, these practices are on the quality of our interpersonal communication. We finish this exercise by discussing the shared values that have been discovered, the value of having principles by which to guide us in our classroom. We close our discussion by coming to an agreement on the principles the class will adopt. This becomes our class contract with regard to our environment & expectations of one another, and contributes to a greater sense of vitality, connection, and courage in the classroom!

*Contributed by Mollie McLaughlin,  
Speech Professor*

For classroom sets of the [Principles for How We Treat Each Other](#), please contact the PJI office or find them online. Please let us know other creative ways that you are embedding the Principles into your practice at Valencia.

**PEACE AND THE ARTS**

**Peace Poetry**

*I love this Hughes poem because when I prepare for class, and especially when I prepare to have the kind of dialogue I outlined above (see Bringing the Principles into the Classroom), I can feel myself moving into the heart space reflected by this poem... Mollie*

**My People**

The night is beautiful,  
So are the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,  
So are the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.  
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

~Langston Hughes



*PJI's 2011-2012 Interns*

**The Veil**

A cloth, a covering,  
A foulard, or even a burqa  
As some would call it!  
To me, it's just a piece of my clothing—  
Nothing less, and nothing more.  
No religion and no philosophy in it,  
Just like my pants, my shirts, or my shoes.  
I wear it for me.  
The few in the East cannot force me to keep it on,  
And the few in the West cannot tell me to take it off.  
You have no say; it's my garment—not yours,  
So just look at me with my covering  
And walk your way  
As I walk mine.  
Don't love me and don't hate me,  
Just let me be 'Me'.

~ Jenna Boumarate

**Celebrate!**

Come laugh with me,  
Come, share my joy!  
Follow me into the place  
Where all are equal  
Where we can rejoice  
In our togetherness,  
Learn different songs,  
A new dance, and a new  
Way to carry the baby.

Come sing with me  
Let our hearts beat  
To the rhythm of love for  
One another as  
We learn to share and  
Dance together. Forget  
The struggle to be  
Perfect, and let go, now!  
We can have fun being one.

Come pray with me!  
Learn a new song,  
A song filled with the love of  
One another and  
Our differences,  
Whatever they may be.  
Created equal,  
Loving one another  
Makes sense. Can we try harder?

~ Anonymous

The following piece was written by Lauri Lott in response to the week-long Conversation on Compassion in January 2012. Lauri worked as a UCF graduate intern in the Peace and Justice office in spring 2012.



**Conversation**

Plan, Draw, Work, Rocks, Learn, Care.  
Eat our fruit, draw compassion, come and listen.

What is Love? How do we define it?  
Spoken word... speaks student  
Quick, look for Rumi's quote  
Free t-shirt  
Volunteer.

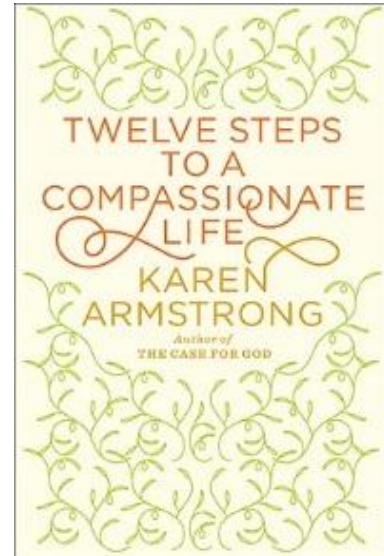
Listen up, let me show you  
Step aside, off the sidewalk.

Ask why? Hands up!  
Upside down, PEACE.

What do we know about knowledge?  
Do you know who I really am?  
I want to live at Disney World  
New York is quite different.  
Feet up, disrespect? Not in this culture!  
Beginnings were tough but in the end  
Bridges, knowledge of each other!  
Who cooks? It's ok for men here!  
Respect comes in different ways.

I can look at you and know.  
Excuse my nakedness!

Close your eyes  
Feet on the floor  
Relax  
Sounds



Lovingkindness  
Send it!

Forgiveness?  
The Amish do it!  
Does it mean forget?  
Forgive yourself first.  
Allow yourself to forgive.  
Power of....

The other?  
I am 'the other', too!

Who are the victims?  
Is their voice heard?  
Unlikely.

Women linked together: forge peace!  
Why can't our country be like Disney?  
We have no street signs, unorganized.  
Main street parade, smiles, greetings, everyone happy!  
Is there a problem with security?  
Why this is the happiest place on earth!

Share my city, my favorite places:  
Beach, white sand, dolphins, manatees  
Frog legs and alligator.  
Space mountain, Pirates of the Caribbean,  
It's a Small World.

Conversations.  
Compassions.

**Check Out Our New Hall Art!**

The United Nations sanctioned International Peace Day is September 21<sup>st</sup>. The mission of Peace Day is to have at least one harmonious, non-violent, cease-fire day throughout the world. For background on **International Peace Day**, go to [www.peaceoneday.org](http://www.peaceoneday.org).

On September 21, 2011, members of the Visual Arts Club designed these four canvases as part of the Peace and Justice Initiative's **International Peace Day** celebration. During this celebration, Valencia students, faculty, and staff were invited to pick up a paint brush to collectively participate in creating these images of peace. The images now grace the hall where the PJI office is located.



Visit the East Campus, Building 1, third floor to see the peace canvases lining the hall.

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**JUNE**

Colleagues Travel to Notre Dame



Congratulations to our Valencia colleagues Dr. Lee Thomas, Dr. Judi Addelston, Dr. James McDonald, and Terry Miller chosen to attend *Teaching Peace in the 21st Century: 4th Annual Summer Institute for Faculty* at Notre Dame this June. [Read More...](#)

**JULY**

Café Conversation on Race – Date and Time TBA

**AUGUST**



Eli Solis, Professor of Spanish Language and Peace Studies travels to Costa Rica August 6<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> to attend the UPEACE-HRC course on Indigenous Peoples' Rights that will take place in Amubri.

The United Nations-mandated [University for Peace](#) was established in December 1980 as a Treaty Organization by the UN General Assembly. The mission of the University for Peace is: *“to provide humanity with an international institution of higher education for peace with the aim of promoting among all human beings the spirit of understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence, to stimulate cooperation among peoples and to help lessen obstacles and threats to world peace and progress, in keeping with the noble aspirations proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations.”*

**PEOPLE**

**Featured Student: Service Learning Intern,  
Liz Connor**



Another “Manic Monday” rolls around and all I want to do is continue being at peace with my eyelids. As I begin to, slowly but surely, get out of bed, I think to myself, “At least Liz will be in the office this morning.” Truthfully, that’s how every Monday this semester has played out.

During this past spring 2012 semester Elizabeth (Liz) Connor, Student Leader of the Student Development team at Valencia College, took position as the Student Intern for the Peace and Justice Initiative, for she expressed, “I want to continue working and interacting with students, while making an impact on people’s lives both on and off campus.” The minute I met Liz, I was hit with an extremely sweet, extremely outgoing personality. I was immediately able to recognize Liz’s personality strength of being able to brighten up any room, even when she is completely overwhelmed with Honors coursework assignments.

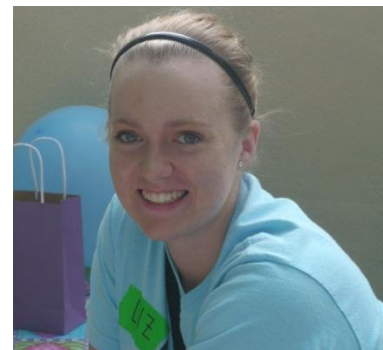
Liz and I worked together at least twice a week—most often every Monday morning and Wednesday afternoon. Through our work together, Liz and I produced a very successful Spring Fling service project at the Coalition for the Homeless. This event was actually Liz’s favorite one to work on throughout this semester, for she sees that, “the kids [of the Coalition] really needed that bright day. It really makes an impact when you go and see how you’re helping people.” Perhaps one of my favorite memories with Liz was when we went shopping for Spring Fling supplies at Target. After filling our carts with bunny ears, candy, balloons, and goody bag supplies, we decided to take a pit stop by the hula hoops. “My record is twenty-three

minutes,” I childishly—and enthusiastically—told Liz as I grabbed a hula hoop off the wall. We then began to have our own hula hoop contest in the middle of the aisle. While showing off our impressive hula hooping moves to each other, we heard a woman strictly shout, “Girls!” With our eyes wide and mouths hanging open, Liz and I quickly grabbed our hula hoops and put an end to our fun. Little did we know, but fortunately for us after finding out, the woman was talking to her young daughters who were arguing with one another. Liz and I burst into a fit of hysterical laughter.

Another reason I have loved having Liz around so much is because of our closeness in age. Although I have become used to most often being the youngest individual in the Initiative, it has been nice to have someone my age around. Together Liz and I can make silly jokes, have slight spurts of immaturity, and talk about the annoyances of “boys,” while still maintaining a huge level of respectfulness and professionalism. That fact is something I have been so thankful for this semester, for it has simply been a fun aspect and something to take the edge off of the meaningful and busy work the Initiative produces.

Liz Connor is the epitome of a hard worker, all while being the epitome of a young woman who is comfortable being herself and having fun. I can truly say I have been honored to work with someone so committed to achieving a high level of greatness, all while staying true to herself. Liz’s integrity is enough to move mountains. I will be sad to not be able to wake up every manic Monday morning to say “at least I have Liz,” but I know that this isn’t the end of our work together. More importantly, I know that this isn’t the end of our friendship with one another.

*Written by Krystal Pherai*



*Liz Connor, PJI Service Learning student  
Spring 2012*

**A Founding Member of the PJI  
is a Featured Colleague**



Subhas Tiwari Rampersaud, professor of political science, teaches U.S. Government and a LinC honors class on the West Campus. When asked what inspired him to come to Valencia, Subhas said, "I was attracted by the student-centered philosophy at Valencia and its rich cultural diversity."

His first interactions with the college came when he was teaching at an institution near East Campus and was invited to present workshops on Yoga and health. "I found my interactions with staff and faculty at Valencia to be warm and welcoming," Subhas explained. "That continues to be my experience at my home campus, where my campus administration, my dean and peers are extremely supportive. I feel at home here."

Subhas is, as one of his peers said, a "student magnet," welcoming them with his innovative approach to learning and gift for transcending cultures. He is passionate about learning through co-curricular activities and believes that such activities are a vital part of developing citizenship participation and awareness among our students.

He is the founder and advisor of HERO (Human Empathy Rights Organization), a student club at the West Campus that boasts a membership of 200 students, and is dedicated to promoting the importance of service learning.

Most recently, Subhas demonstrated his commitment to co-curricular activities through his club's involvement in the week-long [Conversation on Compassion](#) events. Subhas and his students orchestrated the events

surrounding the visiting speaker Agnes Kamara-Umunna, a Liberian radio host and author, who has been instrumental in helping child soldiers integrate back into society after a brutal civil war (see top, left photo). Read more about this event on the Valencia News site in [Women Behind Liberia's Peace Movement Inspire Students, Faculty](#).

Subhas is also an avid Yoga practitioner who introduced the discipline to Valencia in 2006, and is currently teaching credit courses in Yoga at the East Campus. He also volunteers his time to serve as a Hindu lay chaplain for the Central Florida hospitals, and sits on the planning committee of the annual Bioethics Symposium between the Orlando Regional Health Care and the University of Central Florida.

As a dynamic speaker, Subhas has presented at several national and international conferences on topics related to Yoga and education, Yoga and health, and Yoga philosophy. When he is not helping to guide students through their educational journey and toward greater harmony and balance, Subhas tends to his garden, does some carpentry and writes poetry.

Prior to joining Valencia in 2006, he was a faculty member at the Hindu University of America in Orlando. Subhas earned both his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in political science from McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, and a Master of Arts degree in Yoga Philosophy from the Bihar Yoga University in India. He has lived, worked and studied in Guyana, Canada, India and the United States.

This article first appeared in the [Valencia Grove](#).



**PJI's Staff Assistant, Krystal Pherai**



At various times in our lives we as humans meet and socialize with many people. However, in the midst of all these individuals are those who stick out, make a difference, and shine brighter than all the rest. Krystal Pherai has all of these qualities and more! Krystal Pherai is the Staff Assistant for the Peace and Justice Initiative, who began as a PJI Intern in the 2011 Fall Semester. She was one of the very first people I met and continued to work with when I became a part of the Initiative.

I have told Krystal, Laurie, and Ms. Allen that whenever I walk into the Peace and Justice Office there is a certain energy which surrounds us all, one that is productive, relaxing, and most of all encouraging. Krystal is a BIG part of that! She is always so kind and caring when working with Valencia College staff, Clubs/Organizations and volunteers who help with the many PJI events. She also brings a different way of looking at many situations, which has helped me personally when I became overwhelmed with classes and other areas of life.

Krystal, while soft spoken, utilizes all her qualities as a leader in all areas of her position as PJI Staff Assistant. Krystal is an instrumental part of the Peace and Justice family with the amount of work she does on a daily basis, whether it's creating note books and files from past events, creating budget transfers/placement of funds, assisting with designing promotional flyers for events, coordinating events such as the Spring Fling at the Coalition for the Homeless, organizing/gathering volunteers, and much more!

When I interviewed Krystal she said that the reason she became involved with the Peace and Justice Initiative was because, "After taking a Peace Studies class in fall 2010, it really opened my eyes to what is happening in the world today. That is when I began to development a concern for and a want to do something meaningful with my time at Valencia, making a positive difference in student's lives along with the whole world!"

I admire Krystal's passion for peace, because she wishes to, "Spread peace throughout the WORLD!" Krystal also shared with me that one of the things that has impacted her most through the PJI has been the "amazing exposure to all different types of people, cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds!"

Without Krystal I do not believe the Peace and Justice Initiative would have been as successful and made such an impact at Valencia College. I will miss both seeing and talking with her every week and working alongside her in the Peace and Justice Office. Krystal has made my experience at the Peace and Justice Initiative one that I will use as I travel to a university and as I mature in my career field. I will never forget this memorable opportunity! Krystal has become a great friend, and I know we will be for years to come.

*Written by Liz Connor*



*Krystal Pherai, the Staff Assistant to the Peace and Justice Initiative and is a recent graduate of Valencia with her A.A. degree. In the fall she continues her studies at Rollins College as a full time student.*



**The PJI Coordinator is a  
Featured Colleague at Valencia**



“We teach who we are” is a guiding principle for how Rachel Allen, professor of humanities and coordinator of the [Peace and Justice Initiative](#) (PJI), views her position at Valencia.

“Bringing the head and the heart into education is vital for me,” Rachel explained. “Giving space for the individual to tap into passions and purpose is essential to the educational experience.”

Growing up in Winter Park, Rachel spent her time as an actress and apprentice dancer at the Southern Ballet Theatre (now Orlando Ballet) and performed in musical theatre productions in school and local theatres.

She went on to study theatre at Northwestern University, and during her summer breaks she would visit Eagle’s Nest Foundation in North Carolina. It was there that Rachel developed a concern for the environment, a passion for social justice, value for the community, and most importantly, a love for holistic education.

After earning a master’s degree in theatre at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Rachel arrived at Valencia in 1997 as an adjunct instructor in theatre and humanities, and became a full-time humanities professor in 2001. Seemingly, Valencia was just the right place for Rachel. Here she found “a family of people committed to creating a better world.”

Rachel’s tenure-track work in the Teaching and Learning Academy resulted in a class called *What’s Love Got To Do With It?*, which was piloted in 2003. The course, along with Penny Villegas’ *Introduction to Peace Studies* class, became a seed for the peace studies curriculum.

Rachel’s work in peace and justice led her to the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame, allowing her to work with some of the leading scholar-practitioners in the country. The integration of these interests culminated to form a commitment to nonviolence and reflective practice. For Rachel, nonviolence refers to anything that violates the soul of another.

“To be the peace, as Gandhi teaches, we must first examine self,” she said. “Our Principles for How We Treat Each Other are a starting place for a nonviolent practice. It is exciting to see more professors, staff and administrators embrace these principles at the college.”

Through PJI, Rachel has been able to support college-wide, co-curricular activities, including the week-long Conversation on Compassion; expand the *Introduction to Peace Studies* class to three campuses – East, West and Osceola; introduce us to renowned scholars and authors; and bring Valencia national recognition by the U.S. Institute of Peace as one of 21 programs in peace studies.

“The most inspirational aspect about Valencia is the people,” Rachel said. “I never cease to be amazed at the creativity, warmth, passion and high standard of excellence that my colleagues at the college share.”

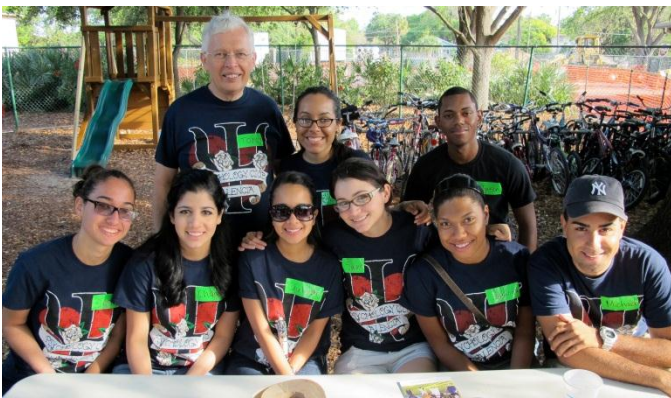
Rachel has been the recipient of the University Club of Orlando Endowed Chair and the Patricia Havill Whalen Endowed Chair. She is married to Willie J. Allen Jr. and they have two children, ages two and three.

If asked about her goal in life, it is to be a kind and loving woman and to make a difference by being part of the positive shift happening in the world.

This article first appeared in the [Valencia Grove](#)

**SERVICE**

Images from the Spring Fling at the [Coalition for the Homeless](#)



## Learning Day 2012

The Peace and Justice Initiative goes to the [Hope CommUnity Center](#)



Thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the Peace and Justice Initiative. We are happy to see the work grow at the college and within the community.