

Smith, D. J. (2007, Spring). Fostering the next generation of peacemakers: Peace and conflict resolution programs at the undergraduate level. *ACResolution: The Quarterly Magazine of the Association for Conflict Resolution*, 6(3), 20-21.

Fostering the Next Generation of Peacemakers

By David J. Smith

“The world needs people who not only understand the dynamics of conflict, but also comprehend ways to peacefully resolve and transform it” (Smith, 2007, p. 21).

David J. Smith (2007), a senior program officer at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., reviews and synthesizes the development of peace studies and conflict resolution programs at undergraduate institutions in the U.S.. Specifically, Smith discusses four issues in his review: (1) conceptual ambiguity: peace studies or conflict resolution programs; (2) peace studies as a field; (3) the development of conflict resolution programs; and (4) future perspectives.

Peace Studies or Conflict Resolution?

Conceptually, Smith argues that there is a great deal of ambiguity and lack of consensus as to how to approach the study of conflict. Several approaches co-exist in the current higher education in the US.

- Some view conflict resolution as a sub-discipline of peace studies.
- Some view conflict resolution as a distinct field.
- Some make no distinction between peace studies and conflict resolution programs (e.g., the *Global Directory of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Programs* (7th edition)).
- Smith (2007) argues for the importance of considering the critical role that peace studies has played as an incubator of undergraduate conflict resolution strategies.

Peace Studies

Peace studies is defined as an interdisciplinary field where “the causes of war and conditions for peace are examined” (p. 20). Overall, Smith (2007) has observed several trends regarding the field of peace studies.

- The field of peace studies was first developed in religious institutions where social justice issues are traditionally emphasized.
- Today, undergraduate peace studies programs are found in three types of institutions: (1) religious institutions with a mission of fostering global peace; (2) public institutions as part of larger programs in international studies, international relations, or political science; and (3) several community colleges.
- Peace studies programs now feature a new emphasis on applied aspects and career opportunities for undergraduates.

Conflict Resolution

In general, conflict resolution programs support functional and applied perspectives on conflict. Overall, Smith identifies several types of conflict resolution programs in different types of institutions:

- Conflict resolution programs tend to be located in state or public universities where conflict is regarded as multi-faceted and is examined from the interpersonal to the global level.
- Conflict resolution in private independent and religious institutions is generally within the context of peace studies.
- Conflict resolution at the community college level tends to be embedded within other career-oriented disciplines.

Future Perspectives

Smith (2007) argues for the need for institutions to support approaches that provide academic and career opportunities for undergraduates in the field of peace and conflict. In doing so, Smith further argues that institutions need to consider a number of questions regarding resources, availability of faculty members, marketing and promotion skills. Smith poignantly concludes that “The world needs people who not only understand the dynamics of conflict, but also comprehend ways to peacefully resolve and transform it.”

(Summary prepared by Yea-Wen Chen, FDR Graduate Assistant)