



Letter from the Director

Constructive conflict moves us forward in creating the world we want to be a part of, one that reflects our most important values and desires... Resolution of deeply rooted conflicts will not occur without disruption.

The Neutrality Trap, Bernard Mayer and Jacqueline Font-Guzman



Our new location on the Vermont Campus, the Bowker Barn (161 Adirondack View).

From global wars to national elections, individual episodes of conflict are guided by deeper dynamics. The conflict transformation approach invites us to see beyond those episodes toward the epicenter ([Lederach 2003](#)) - the deep roots that feed polarization, inequality, and violence.

As a professor. I find it relatively easy to write a paragraph about larger systems.

but as a community member and nascent practitioner, I am humbled by the challenges we face to foster constructive conflict. Some conflicts are downright dangerous, and we need to avoid them to stay safe. But other times conflict is uncomfortable - and we may need to practice sitting with discomfort that disrupts our understandings. That practice with discomfort requires patience and deep listening – two things that, at least for me, are really challenging, and I often come up short.

How do we recognize and make space for the disruption inherent in changing systems? How can we embrace uncertainty while practicing patience and creativity for the long haul? In this newsletter, you'll find some examples of how our CT partners are tackling these questions.

I find wisdom and inspiration in reflective leaders who tackle the hardest topics - like whether calls for dialogue and mediation interfere with meaningful social change (see the quote above). Bernard Mayer is a central scholar and practitioner in the international conflict field. He partnered with colleague Jacqueline Font-Guzman, a scholar of Puerto Rican nationalism and a lawyer, to tackle that question in [*The Neutrality Trap*](#). They critique both silencing dissent and embracing chaotic disruption. Instead, they argue that conflict engagement and strategic disruption are complementary approaches to stronger institutions and social systems.

If you are interested in thinking through tough questions like these, keep reading and come find us! A few events and convenings ahead for your calendar:





- On [Tuesday, September 10, 7 pm ET](#), we launch our fall [Good Talks 2024](#) event - structured small group discussions, with a facilitator, expert, and snacks, to have a good talk about political issues. The topics: trust in democracy, housing, reproductive policy, environment, foreign policy, health care, and immigration.
- In California, a new group of [CT Cohort Fellows](#) start at MIIS this fall. You are invited to join them on [Friday, September 20th, 7 pm PT](#) with author Ava Homa - “Using Fiction to Understand International Relations, History, and Conflict”
- In Vermont, the CT Collaborative will hold an [Open House on September 27th, 1-3 pm ET](#), to celebrate our move to Bowker Barn (161 Adirondack View)
- Our annual research grants application for faculty at the College and MIIS will open soon, with applications due at the end of October ([click here for more](#)).

Our network is growing, supported by an awesome team of Pillar Heads who oversee our programs, a small but powerful staff at the Collaborative, and an inspiring external advisory board. Reach out to [these folks](#), join us during community hours, or send an email to conflicttransformation@middlebury.edu.

With gratitude and hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Stutz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

A New Academic Cluster at Middlebury College

This fall, we are excited to launch a new [CT Academic Cluster](#) for Middlebury undergraduates. Academic clusters are a flexible, optional way for students to build connections between and among disciplines and experiential learning. Clusters are not formal majors or minors - our program allows students to foster the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to enable more constructive engagement in conflicts.

To receive a certificate of completion, students will complete a series of courses in conflict analysis and skill building, participate in an experiential learning program connected to CT, and write a final short reflective essay. We are excited to see how students develop their paths to constructive conflict! Many thanks to our partners in our experiential learning centers, our Schools Abroad, and the Poverty and Privilege cluster for support in the development of this new project.



New Leadership: Building Interdisciplinary

Approaches to Conflict



Dance professor Linda Winfield.

[Lida Winfield](#), Assistant Professor of Dance, is the new head of the Undergraduate CT Pillar! Former pillar head Sebnem Gumuscu (Political Science) is starting a well-deserved sabbatical, and Lida and Sebnem have worked closely together, modeling interdisciplinary collaboration and enabling a smooth handoff. Many thanks to both for their leadership, expertise, and commitment!

Lida has worked extensively with the Conflict Transformation Collaborative while integrating constructive conflict skills and creativity into her work with students. Lida was one of sixteen faculty and staff enrolled in a 32-hour mediation training this past summer, sponsored by the CT Collaborative. Trainer [Susanne Terry and her coaches](#) expanded the skills of participants to listen, ask questions, move from positions to deeper interests, and stay curious - all of which will support students and colleagues navigating conflict across the college.

In partnership with Dima Ayoub (Arabic), Brian Lind (Student Engagement), and Jonathan Miller-Lane (Education Studies), Lida has also expanded our professional development program, the [Engaged Listening Project \(ELP\)](#). Now

professional development program, the [Engaged Listening Project](#). Focused on both structured dialogue and restorative practices, the ELP opened with a two-day workshop for eighteen faculty and staff in late August. The mission of the ELP is to develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to foster our ability to welcome, recognize, and explore the contributions of each member of our community for the purpose of deepening our learning.



Engaged Listening Project Fall 2024 Cohorts.

Deepening Student, Faculty, and Staff Engagement at the Institute

We have spent a busy summer preparing graduate student and faculty engagement opportunities for the year ahead. In July, Graduate Pillar Lead Dr. Netta Avineri [presented](#) to prospective and admitted MIIS students around conflict transformation, interdisciplinarity, language, and social change. At New Student orientation, CT Pedagogy Fellows Xiaofei Shen and Ali Jaffery will be at the Opportunity Fair with CT resources, and Netta will lead a session called

the Opportunity Fair with CI resources, and Netta will lead a session called Culture, Conflict and Change at MIIS.

Institute and College students in Middlebury Social Impact Corps have been working with Blue Zones of Monterey and Salinas Valley Health Care on their ParkRX program, synthesizing best practices, engaging with stakeholders throughout Monterey County, and developing press releases, social media, and bilingual public-facing documents. While engaging in social issues in Monterey County, students reflect on their positionalities, consider tensions at various scales in their work, and proactively engaged with those conflicts throughout the 5-week intensive program.



Summer 2024 Middlebury Social Impact Corps Cohort.

This fall, we welcome a new group of over 40 Cohort Fellows. These in-person and online students from a range of degree programs (and 3 from the

Middlebury School Abroad in France) are supported by new peer Mentor Fellows. This peer mentorship and learning involves discussions, meeting with guest speakers, and creating shared resources. This rich, interdisciplinary learning is a distinctive component of the CT Fellowship program at MIIS, and we look forward to another meaningful year ahead.

K-12 Teachers Explore Language, Creativity, and Storytelling



Students and instructors from the 2024 Change Curriculum courses at BLSE.

The “Teaching, Writing, and Acting for Change” curriculum at the summer Bread Loaf School of English centers the role of storytelling and the humanities in understanding and approaching conflict. The 20 K-12 teachers at BLSE this summer enrolled in one of several complementary courses. David Wandera’s *Transcultural Literacies* and Craig Maravich’s *Creative Practice* are regular parts of the “Change” curriculum, providing teachers ways to think about communication through language and movement and how to structure creative and courageous classrooms. In a new course on *Zora Neale Hurston*, Michelle Robinson led an exploration of Hurston’s many roles as storyteller.

...heron led an exploration of Hurston's many roles as storyteller, anthropologist, and change agent. The excitement around the Hurston course was elevated because of the pending publication of her posthumous book, "The Life of Herod the Great." When asked about how these discussions informed his understanding of conflict transformation, one student offered a clear summary: "there is no growth without conflict."

Exploring CT in Study Abroad and Lessons Learned

It has been inspirational to learn from colleagues abroad whose understandings of conflict dynamics have enriched our work. This year, Professor Hassan Belhiah at the Middlebury School in Morocco had three student research assistants exploring cultural-linguistic landscapes in modern Morocco. Their research shows how language can both instigate and transform past and present conflicts, exploring reintegration movements for Moroccan Jews, the intersection of language and economic disparities, and US-government sponsored Arabic language programs.

On October 17th in Athens, Greece, leading CT educators from across the global Middlebury institution will be leading the [opening plenary panel](#) at The [Forum on Education Abroad](#)'s Europe, Middle East and Africa Conference. The panel, "Embracing and Transforming Conflict to Enhance Education Abroad Learning for All," features MIIS professor David Wick, Middlebury School in Jordan professor Kerstin Wilsch, and Middlebury School in Cameroon director Christiane Magnido, as well as EUSA Paris Director Jon Hutchinson.





MIIS professor David Wick.



Middlebury School in Jordan professor Kerstin Wilsch.





Middlebury School in Cameroon director Christiane Magnido.

Reflection, Learning, and Inspiration during Experiential Opportunities

Over 100 students participated in CT-connected experiences this summer, from internships in South Africa with [diiVe](#) to mentoring refugee and immigrant youth in Connecticut with our [History in Translation](#) program. These immersive engagements with conflict can be transformative when students have space to reflect on what they are observing and how they understand their own agency and capacities.

In May, students started with a self-assessment and discussion of their own conflict styles using the [Thomas-Kilmann](#) Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). In July, students watched a talk by University of Victoria professor Vanessa Andreotti on “[Conflict Engagement and Peacebuilding in a Volatile and Uncertain World](#)” and then gathered for a discussion of how to address conflict through a systems perspective.

On September 30, we will host our final convening, and are thrilled to feature 2024 Projects for Peace Alumni Award Winner [Bienfait Mugenza](#) as the keynote

speaker. Mugenza is the founder of the Congo Peace Academy, which works to support employment, empowerment, and dialogue for young people as a way to develop “peace entrepreneurs” in eastern Congo. Special thanks to Projects for Peace director Betsy Vegso for her expertise and partnership in this work!



University of Victoria professor Dr. Vanessa Andreotti.

2024 Projects for Peace Alumni Award Winner Bienfait Mugenza.



That's all... for now!

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The CT Collaborative at Middlebury works to embed the practice of conflict transformation in the full continuum of a... more

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Opinion | A recipe for cooling down American politics

I've worked in war-torn countries, and I've seen what works. People need to leave their bubbles.

5 min · 10K

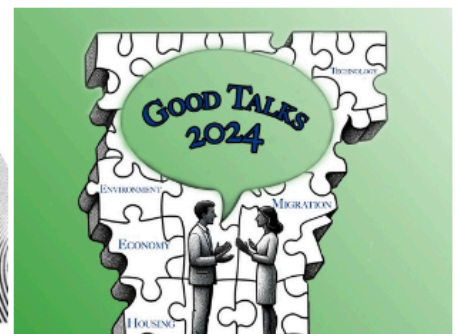


(Washington Post staff illustration; Cloude)

By John Paul Lederach
August 16, 2024 at 7:00 a.m. EDT



From Polarization to Progress
College Presidents Join Forces





@ 2024 STUDENT SPRING SYMPOSIUM

9:15-10:30am: Democratic Dialogues, MBH 303
Students and Oratory in Action students will lead an introduction on how to speak to be understood and listen to understand.

9:15-9:30am: Global Body in Conflict, MBH 311
Presentation by Hannah Ennis '24 on a year-long research project related to the Dance Department's 2023 CT Research Symposium.

12:25pm: Nature-Based Activities for Teachers of Color
Notaro '24 and Victoria Shuster '25 share their experiences from the CT-funded Anthropology course that journeyed to the Vincent in Winter 2024.

The Conflict Transformation Instagram page.

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