



11-16-2010

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Recommended Citation

Fields '12, Kristin and Hatch, Rachel, "2010 Peace Fellow Selected" (2010). *News and Events*. 1524.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/1524>

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2010 Peace Fellow Selected

November 16, 2010

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University has announced senior Gwen Robinson as the 2010-2011 Peace Fellow. The Peace Fellows Program, created in 2007 by IWU alumnus John Stutzman and his wife, Erma, annually awards fellowships to students interested in peace, social justice and conflict resolution.

In addition to taking Illinois Wesleyan courses in these areas, students selected to participate in the Peace Fellows Program are required to further explore their commitment to peace by completing an independent study and participating in an off-campus internship in the United States or abroad. The program offers \$1,000 to each student in order to help them complete these personal projects.

In her pursuit of the peace fellows program, Robinson has chosen to focus on the violence imposed upon women, a kind of violence that she believes is “quiet, private and cultural.”

“I believe that anywhere women are denied autonomy they are at risk of violence. In fact I would argue that the denial of autonomy is itself a form of violence,” said Robinson. Her independent study will center on exploring the role of women throughout Francophone history and literature. Robinson, who is a theatre arts and international studies double major with a French and Francophone studies minor, is pursuing her studies in Pune, India. “The intense social and economic stratification of society makes India a great place for me to learn about development,” said the native of Elmhurst, Ill.

While at Illinois Wesleyan, Robinson staged a production of *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein to highlight how children’s literature teaches gender roles to young Americans. Before that, she directed David Mamet’s *Oleanna*, which also discusses gender roles. “My goal with that production was for the audience to leave the theatre unsure of whether the man or woman was in the right. I wanted the audience to be conscious of how they decode gender roles in their own life,” said Robinson.

Previous Peace Fellows Continue Studies

Jessica Meyer, a 2009-2010 Peace Fellow and senior international studies major from Chicago, Ill., is currently studying at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. While taking four classes on human rights, she also interns at the Action Support Centre, a non-governmental organization based in Johannesburg, which focuses on breaking down conflict by leading workshops in local communities. Specifically, Meyer and her colleagues have concentrated on xenophobia trends in South Africa, as well as peace education within the schools. “It opens up a dialogue between people from various backgrounds and opinions,” explained Meyer.

Though she is thousands of miles away, Meyer said, “My heart is always with IWU.” She remains involved on campus in the student group Renegades for Peace. While abroad, she has continued to write a column for the *Argus* discussing what she learns about peace and human rights issues.

Not wanting to write a paper that would soon be forgotten, Meyer will instead research and develop a peace class curriculum through an independent study for the Peace Fellowship when she returns spring semester. As the University expands its studies in peace and nonviolence, she hopes IWU will eventually use her curriculum. “I want to produce something that can be used not only by IWU but also by myself in future endeavors,” said Meyer. “Illinois Wesleyan is

where I developed my passion for peace. If it weren't for professors and the powerful atmosphere a university has for knowledge and activism, I wouldn't be who I am today."

Emily Coles, a senior International Studies and French double major from Champaign, Ill., spent this summer on an internship with the U.S. State Department in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There, she worked to help the U.S. Embassy prepare for the July 11 commemoration of the ethnic massacre of Muslim Bosnians at the town of Srebrenica in 1995. The country is still dealing with the aftermath of the massacre, said Coles, who visited the town and spoke with residents. "They are still in the healing process," she said.

After graduation, Coles said she plans to return to Bosnia, where she wants to see the Dayton Peace Agreement succeed. "You want to see a country move forward from such atrocities, but at times it seems the situation is breaking down," said Coles. "I want to work to make sure a massacre like the one in Srebrenica will never happen again."

Coles said she enjoys the connection she shares with her Peace Study Fellow colleagues, whose efforts inspire her every day. "Talking together about the problems of the world and our passion for social justice keeps us going," said Coles, who noted she and the other fellows hope to bring the lessons they learned back to Illinois Wesleyan. "We have been exposed to so much, and we want IWU to benefit from that."

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