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2009-2010 Peace Fellows Selected

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2009-2010 Peace Fellows Selected

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University has announced students Emily Coles and Jessica Meyer as the 2009 Peace Fellows. The Peace Fellows Program, created in 2007 by IWU alumnus John Stutzman and his wife, Erma, annually awards fellowships to first-year students and sophomores 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.

For Coles, the fellowship is an opportunity to get closer to the issues that matter most to her. “The fellowship means an ability to pursue something of importance that is outside the range of typical academic studies. It really pushes you to go out and do something more,” said Coles, a junior international studies and French double major. She is particularly interested in how to best protect human rights, especially those of children in conflict areas. “I have developed a passionate interest in the plight of children, especially refugees and child soldiers, whose lives have been disrupted by war,” said Coles, of Champaign, Ill.

“As a Peace Fellow, I plan to examine past and current attempts to deal with the problems of refugees and to propose a strategy for addressing them in the future,” said Coles. Her internships and studies for the Peace Fellows Program have allowed Coles to interact personally with those who have had to react to refugee situations. This summer she completed two internships, the first at the Dutch Parliament in The Hague and the second at the World Health Organization in Geneva.

At the Dutch Parliament, Coles was able to interview many members concerning the fall of Srebrenica, an area under the control of the Dutch Peacekeepers during the Balkan Conflict. “The disaster in Srebrenica created a crisis for the Dutch government and the effects of this crisis are still being felt in the Netherlands. The information I collected from my interviews will inform my work on the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons,” said Coles. At the World Health Organization, she worked for the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases. “Disease is something that often plagues refugee camps,” said Coles, “I was able to get some insight into the operation of an international organization whose work indirectly impacts the plight of refugees.”

Coles is currently in Copenhagen at the Danish Institute for Study Abroad. She is taking courses on human rights, ethnic conflict, terrorism and the European Union. She plans on continuing her studies abroad next summer. “I have begun the application process for a position in an American or Dutch embassy in Francophone, Africa. I will also be applying for a position with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which would give me insight into an organization that is directly concerned with refugees,” said Coles.

Peace Fellow Meyer, a resident of Elk Grove Village, Ill., says working for peace, human rights and social justice is her greatest passion. She is in her junior year and is pursuing an international studies major with a human rights emphasis and political science minor. This is Meyer’s third year as coordinator of the Illinois Wesleyan branch of Amnesty International, a human rights organization that advocates peace, social justice and human rights. Meyer is also an Organize for Hope fellow, which is related to the American Friends Service Committee, a pacifist organization dedicated to promoting peace. She is a multicultural educator through the Office of Residential Life at Illinois Wesleyan.

For Meyer, knowledge is the best way to prevent conflict. “My goal is to make human rights activism a normal part of everyday life for citizens in America simply by learning about an issue and discussing it with others. Once it is something we value, the potential for action to stop these problems all over the world is unstoppable. Educating early, in elementary schools and in homes, is the best way to promote peace,” said

Meyer.

Meyer is also using her internship and off-campus study to further her knowledge on how education relates to peace. She is in the process of securing an internship with Normal's UNITY community center, which provides after school programs for youth with limited resources. "I hope to teach the students about peace in creative ways such as art and drama," said Meyer. She also plans to go to Rwanda and Uganda this summer. She hopes to learn about the education process in these countries, and would like to study the events leading up to conflict in these areas and observe the peace after war.