

***Students for Human Rights and Democratic Education:
A Student Conference to Commemorate International Human Rights Day
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA
December 2, 2007***

Keynote: Jerome Shestack, Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights; Former President of the American Bar Association

Jerome Shestack provided historical context for human rights globally. He also discussed current world affairs and the issue of the denial of rights in the interest of security. He stressed that there is still a lot to achieve around the world for this to be a society of universal value- “one to be happy to live in and proud to be part of”, and that each person in the room has the ability to make a difference, but together, the collective, has power.

He warned that one of the biggest challenges is that “we live in an apathetic world, that doesn’t often care about anything beyond their own well being, with people that do not often see themselves as part of a larger connected society.” (i.e. Darfur) He encouraged students to get involved, join protest groups, inform policy makers, utilize the important power of media – the world opinion makers, news makers, and catalyze higher education as key organization for change.

Breakout Session #1

Defining the role of universities and colleges in advancing human rights and democracy.

Group1

What is democracy and how is democracy viewed?

- Rhetoric vs. implementation
- Critical thinking
- Importance of Media – Is it irresponsible?
- Practice democratic habits outside of government’s role
- More activism, less apathy

Role of Institutions of Higher Education

- Community Outreach - Bring more community members into classroom both as lecturers and fellow students
- Accessibility of information, cut down on red tape
- Mediums for human rights and democracy
- Education
- Implementation
- Get students excited

University should help us to model how to sort through all the information, to know where we stand in this society of information overload

Group 2

What are we doing on campuses?

Currently:

- Activist groups: Exist but have a hard time making waves on the campus.
 - How to get the information out to the greater campus?
 - Apathy causes lack of awareness and uninformed students
 - Feeling of helplessness
- Faculty Initiatives
- Protests

Once informed what to do? What should higher education's role be?

- Administration could help sponsor, encourage and endorse activities for human rights and democracy
- Need a unified front: widespread collaboration/cooperation between faculty and students
- Develop a university value system: determine what the institution stands for, human rights collaboration, speakers, faculty etc... create a value system, weed out what should or shouldn't be endorsed – university to help achieve informed, active citizens

Group 3

What is the role of higher education in promoting human rights and democracy?

- Need to establish resources (financial, etc.)
- Need an entity to centralize information for all the groups:
 - Develop a Human Rights Center on each campus as an umbrella organization for all human rights organizations and work. The Center should know pulse of human rights groups and help find resources.
- Petition/Encourage the Provost – to get this work implemented
- Establish a career counselor position for Human right positions/work
- Start early in college career - Orientation week – give direction on how to get involved and make a difference
- Develop curriculum – human rights courses and hands on action; action – beyond discourse

Student Panel: Inspiring Grassroots Change

Eric Schwartz, Geoffrey See, Hauchie Pang and James Liu (University of Pennsylvania)

Key Themes: How can we make change in the world?

- Rhetorical and financial support needed from central university administrations and International Consortium to create democratic education, course development, support overall work – real world work, issues
- Democratic education combined with social action; linking education and mission of university with the community the institution is part of.
 - Courses – democratic education/social change works best when integrated into curriculum; problem solving looking

- Identify problem, work with faculty to research situation, work on the problem and actually create change in the field (i.e. Health care – lack of knowledge in the community; greater integration between health care center, university, and high school students, help students to develop as nodes of health care knowledge)
- Institutions must commit to and work locally and globally (i.e. Penn Compact)
- Social entrepreneurship for Wharton business students; social innovation; intersection of business principles and the social sector; more classroom and internship skills needed in social sector to make impact and fulfill urban institution responsibility
- Importance of building partnerships across campus, with administration. To democratize education, students must learn about/understand the curriculum, university administration, and what the potential of the institution is.
- Find the connections between the college students and the community (including local schools and organizations), highlight and take advantage of strengths and talents. Connection must be long term and have direct action.
- Framework for assessment is needed - metacourses on the democratic development of courses, surveys assessing the attitude of students towards democratic education (i.e. National Survey Student Engagement), assessment of impact on community.
- Systematic study of all programs on campuses – What are they and what impacts are they having?

Conclusion: This is happening now. This is how problems are solved – create infrastructure for groups to learn from one another in the university, between universities, among universities - create problem solving clusters with problem solving learning as the nucleus.

Breakout Session #2

Developing an action plan and criteria for assessing the performance of universities and colleges in advancing opportunities for advocacy

- Interest and requirements in humanities/history decreasing: Students aren't getting the background in history/humanities which provides students with the necessary knowledge to understand world social issues.
 - Need to start before college: some high schools putting service into the curriculum, more is needed
 - Precedence at some higher eds for social justice requirement (i.e. Haverford)
 - Need to fulfill requirement to get students to take them
 - Incorporate into freshman seminar; make as an option until it gains momentum
 - Claim in educational, psychological research – problem solving, collaborative nature – takes education to another level
 - Address this issue with: Provost, Office of Student Life, Student Committee on Undergraduate Education
 - Host a Town Hall Meeting or implement a survey to test student reaction to human rights requirement.

- Preceptorials may be a good alternative if curriculum requirements can not be changed.
- Students should collaborate around areas of interest in interdisciplinary clusters tied to curriculum. Students, faculty and community members to present on issues and successes.
- Develop an umbrella organization for all groups interested in human rights, democracy, democratic education, social justice.
 - Most campus have such groups that collaborate for special events but collaboration isn't sustained throughout the year. -- *How to go beyond one event?*
 - Each year have key issue: Student groups submit issues; umbrella selects issue – all organizations work together for that larger issue
 - Concern: Would groups feel like they lost voice/autonomy?
 - Possible solution: Require just one event to apply to issue
- *How can the institution relate to the broader community?*
 - Media is incredibly important. Not only distribute the message, makes the message. Must hold media accountable.
 - University/students can hold an alternative media: Dialogue/Discourse; experiment, refine dialogue and through school have a face
 - Network of all universities to collaborate with a central website where all activities can be contained
 - Institutional mission used as basis. Watchdog for the university. Listen to the university presidents, watch what universities are saying and what really happens.
- *How to integrate other institutions?*
 - Website – Create issue areas for campuses to display different activities
 - Meetings – Annual conference?
 - Point people at each institution
 - Utilize networks – i.e. Ivy Council.org – Share ideas, board/rep structure
- ***What are the criteria?***
 - Open platform and transparency
 - Student, faculty, administration, community accessibility
 - Interchangeable positions – collaborative; shared responsibilities (faculty, student, staff) for teaching, learning and research.
 - Affect on local and global community
 - Courses
 - # of courses
 - How many students take those courses?
 - Proportion of student population enrolled
 - Course that emphasize democratic education
 - Interdisciplinary learning- different people, disciplines

Breakout Session Summary

- 1) Interchangeability between members (faculty, students, administration, community) and responsibility
- 2) Open platform of autonomy and collaboration
 - Transparency

- Example: College website should tell how students can develop new courses – transparency allows everyone access to the knowledge of how to go through process
- 3) Number of courses in line with democratic education and human rights
 - o Participation of students in proportion to students
- 4) Does “x” (courses, organizations, transparency, etc.) exist? Open platform – opportunities for all undergrads to have access to student leaders, faculty and administration
- 5) Dynamic organization with useful function – forum with influence
 - o Committee
 - o Print Media – campus, local, national newspapers
 - o Multimedia – campus TV/radio, local news/radio, internet

Recommendations for Action:

- 1) Creation of website and blog, individual campuses, nationally and internationally (IC and CoE to host)
 - Website as forum between universities – share information, blogs, wiki forum
 - Website as watchdog – i.e. Freedom for Individual Rights & Education (FIRE) – Post progress, examine what universities are saying and what they’re doing
- 2) Establishment of criteria for how campuses are doing in terms of human rights and democratic education.
 - Simple scoring
 - Evaluative function could be linked to a course and student organization
- 3) Create campus-based umbrella organization to evaluate as well as register/bring together all related organization on each campus.
- 4) Create a national (or international) organization made up of the campus organizations
 - Ideally, national organization help to fund local chapters
 - Each campus would have representative that would serve as all-campus steering committee
- 5) Collaborative meetings – local, national, global level
- 6) Annual conference – larger, better representation
- 7) Spread the word
 - Talk with media – get this involved with their rankings; students to motivate press
 - Press releases
 - Ivy League
 - AAC&U, Campus Compact, ACE to help outreach
 - Presentations by students as national meeting
 - Democracy Imperative
 - Regional Networks (such as PHENND, Tricollege Collaborative)

Next Steps: *What are the means forward to put all these things in place?*

- Get these ideas out!
- Democracy Imperative – UNH – sponsor webinar/conference call to further work (end of January, early February)
- Subgroup/Drafting Committee to:
 - Create a summary of conference and ideas for dissemination
 - Draft a press release; utilize campus communication and campus paper channels; Op Ed piece why universities should get involved
- International Consortium (Linda/Joann) – to send summary to Higher Ed organizations, IC leadership