

# CONFLICT ZONE, COMFORT ZONE

Ethics, Pedagogy, and Effecting Change  
in Field-Based Courses

EDITED BY AGNIESZKA PACZYŃSKA AND SUSAN F. HIRSCH

STUDIES IN CONFLICT, JUSTICE, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Front cover images:

(top) Olive Tree Initiative student trip to the Middle East  
Photo by Daniel Wehrenfennig

(bottom) Students walking the disputed property boundary  
during GMU field-based course in Liberia  
Photo by Agnieszka Paczyńska

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# FOUR

## Developing Leaders through Innovative Education

*The Olive Tree Initiative's Experiential Learning Approach to  
Teaching about Intractable Conflicts*

DANIEL R. BRUNSTETTER AND DANIEL WEHRENFENNIG

Teaching about intractable conflicts such as Israeli-Palestinian or Turkish-Armenian relations is one of the most important, yet challenging, subject areas that potentially bring together students, faculty, and community members.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding the global importance of these issues, international events related to such conflicts can have a large impact on campus climate. While reverberations of international events are common in a globalizing world, they can be both inspiring and problematic in the university setting. Activism around such issues at universities is a vital part of the student experience because it marks an expression of the fundamental values of the United States—freedom of speech and the right to assembly. Yet activism can quickly become a battleground dynamic that impedes learning by shutting down alternative or competing perspectives essential to critical thinking. This can lead to divisiveness and the reproduction of misinformation, negative stereotypes, and intolerance among students that can negatively impact campus climate and be detrimental to the broader goals of higher education. The challenge for educators is to harness these issues in a way that promotes learning

and an appreciation of difference that reflects the values of democratic society and global citizenship.

In response to tensions on the campus of the University of California (UC), Irvine, related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we developed an innovative model of experiential learning adapted to intractable conflicts that combines rigorous study on campus with a short-term study-abroad component in the conflict region and close mentorship of students that focuses on leadership development. This model is the core of an educational program known as The Olive Tree Initiative (OTI), whose mission is twofold: (1) to promote conflict analysis and resolution through experiential education by providing students with the training and experiences needed to better negotiate and solve conflicts and (2) to develop leaders by training students to bridge the gap between theory and practice by applying the skills and knowledge they acquire to a campus and community setting. Operating since 2008, OTI has become a signature program of the University of California. It has spread to multiple California campuses (including UCLA, UC Berkeley, and Chapman University), as well as internationally at the University of Glasgow.

The main goal of this chapter is to delineate the theoretical underpinnings that inform OTI's innovative educational philosophy and illustrate how theory plays out in practice through examples drawn from our experiences with participating students. In doing so, it can serve, like Jennifer M. Ramos's chapter 5, as a window into the decision-making process, the benefits, and the challenges of organizing such a program. While we do not specifically address the ethical concerns we faced in designing this program, the insights provided by Pushpa Iyer in chapter 3 set the tone for anyone thinking about building a program and offer essential reading for those who must continually reevaluate and seek to improve existing programs. First, we discuss the importance of dialogue as the core component. Then we explain how we combine a narratives approach to teaching about conflict with a short-term study-abroad trip to the conflict region to enhance student learning. Finally, we articulate how the overall experience promotes leadership development. In the conclusion, we highlight the best practices that can be adopted on a broader scale.

### Building the Context for Productive Dialogue

OTI's philosophy is grounded in the potentially transformative impact of intergroup dialogue to bridge the differences that define intractable conflicts. From a theoretical basis, the importance of dialogical interaction has been solidly established in major theories on communication and peace and conflict studies. The most influential research on communication and dialogue is the intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954).

According to this theory, interaction over a concentrated period of time between people from different backgrounds (e.g., ethnic, religious, and political) can overcome hostilities and prejudices when the situation fosters close intergroup contact (Williams 1947). This theory spawned a multitude of studies that help clarify the ground rules and conditions that have to be in place for positive attitude-change and prejudice-reduction processes conducive to peace to occur (Abu-Nimer 1999). Miles Hewstone and Rupert Brown (1986) argue, for example, that in order for contact to improve intergroup relations in society, there needs to be a somewhat equal status between the groups and that the groups must be in pursuit of a common or superordinate goal. More recent studies show that dialogue and communication processes are crucial for contact between conflicting groups to be conducive to improving intergroup perceptions. Karen E. Pettigrew (1998) examines the effect of emotional ties of friendship with out-group members on attitudes and found that having an out-group friend was powerfully predictive of lower levels of prejudice. Similarly, Karmela Liebkind and Alfred L. McAlister (1999) conduct field experiments examining the effect of extended intergroup contact, showing that increasing intergroup interactions had a significant positive impact on attitudes.

A significant number of dialogue programs have been developed specifically in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the goal of reducing hostility and increasing understanding and cooperation between Israeli Jews and Palestinians (Adwan and Bar-On 2000; Suleiman 1997). These programs have met with mixed success and inevitably have shortcomings. The most critical concerns raised by scholars include the challenge of creating equality among participants where power differences exist in reality, the tendency of positive effects to decline over the long term

as participants return to their communities (Helman 2002; Abu-Nimer 2004; Schimmel 2009), and the limited impact of such experiences when confined to the small number of participants (Bekerman 2007). Despite these shortcomings, such programs nevertheless substantiate the potential impact of dialogue in ameliorating intergroup hostilities (see Maoz 2011 for a review).

OTI's experiential education is grounded in these theoretical findings, with the innovative elements—the study-abroad aspect and leadership focus—designed to address the critical concerns raised by scholars. The first step of the educational process is to foster optimal dialogue conditions. To do so, close attention is paid to four key factors: selecting diverse students, providing a safe intellectual environment, engaging students as partners in the process of achieving common goals, and developing dialogue skills.

OTI members are chosen to represent a multitude of political and religious viewpoints. The goal of student selection is to obtain relative balance in order to have equal representation of students supporting each "side" of the conflict. In addition, we recruit students who self-identify with neither side as well as those who have personal ties to other conflict zones. The former help ensure narrative balance and to promote critical perspective taking, while the latter provide a key comparative element to conversations about victimhood and empathy. These nonpartisan students help reduce the tendency for conversations to break down from dialogue into an "us-versus-them" confrontation by encouraging students to think more generally about the human condition as opposed to specific identities. The nonpartisan students frequently volunteer to be peer facilitators in difficult situations, such as after controversial or emotional speakers. These students can more easily detach themselves from the conflict to carry on conversations about very personal and emotional issues in an inquisitive and nonemotional fashion. For example, on a recent trip after a meeting with Mark Regev—who was at the time spokesperson of the Israeli prime minister—the evenings' reflection focused on the question of recognizing Israel as a Jewish state (one of Regev's main talking points). While initially emotions ran high within the group as the affiliated students tended to see things as a zero-sum affair, the nonaffiliated students were able to steer the

conversation in such a way that laid out the implications—positive and negative—for various different parties within the region.

Having a plurality of student voices represented is essential to maximize the learning impact, as each student interprets and reacts to the various learning stimuli (a text in class, a speaker in the region) in different ways according to his or her personal biases. The ability to see and hear the reactions of one's peers to the same stimuli is the first step toward perspective-taking and developing empathy for the Other. For example, on one of the Middle East trips, an Arab student remarked to a Jewish peer during the daily reflection, "I still disagree with what you have to say, but this has been the first time I could actually listen to it and understand how you felt."

The next step of the process is developing a safe intellectual and emotional space for students to express themselves. We recognize that embracing the willingness to be emotionally and intellectually vulnerable is essential to learning conflict resolution but very difficult when students' identities are wrapped into the conflict. Students are encouraged to speak their minds and to embrace asking questions and giving personal answers, with the goal of better understanding each other's perspectives (Stone, Patton, and Heen 2010). This openness, however, tends not to develop immediately but rather over time as students learn to trust each other. Following the literature that suggests an optimal dialogue situation is maximized if the parties involved share a common goal (Lederach 1996), OTI is structured in a way that makes students work together toward a shared goal. While the long-term goal of education and leadership development can seem too vague for students to agree to set aside their differences, we find that many students are willing to work together toward preparing the short-term study-abroad experience. As part of the process, students are given the responsibility to organize and run weekly organizational meetings. Working closely with faculty, they formulate an educational timeline to prepare intellectually for the trip, collectively fundraise in the community to pay for it, and choose the speakers and itinerary. Having a diverse group ensures that all relevant narratives are included in the educational sessions that precede the trip and, to the extent possible, on the trip itinerary.



The attempt to find a consensus amid differing opinions is the beginning of a learning process whereby students develop the skills of dialogue. In addition to learning by doing, students take a course on conflict resolution to learn dialogue techniques and familiarize themselves with theories of conflict resolution. They become equipped with the tools needed to carry out a productive dialogue, including how to ask questions, how to be an attentive listener, how to communicate respectively one's own views, and how to engage with those who hold differing viewpoints. In teaching students these skills, role playing and facilitated discussions are the prominent methods. These skills are constantly being put into practice and further honed as students work together planning their trip and, as we will see in the next section, learn together about the conflict.

#### *The Narratives Approach: Combining Classroom Learning and Travel Abroad*

There are many approaches to teaching about intractable conflicts, including focusing on history, social science explanations, or the nature of the actors and their ideas (Caplan et al. 2012). Influenced by literature that illustrates the importance of narratives in shaping identity (Rotberg 2006; Adwan and Bar-On n.d.; Salomon 2004), we privilege a narratives approach that, in the words of Thomas Juneau and Mira Sucharov, "focuses on the experience of political actors in understanding and framing their actions [which] helps to unpack the sometimes elusive concept of identity" that is central to understanding international relations and to engaging in successful dialogue (Juneau and Sucharov 2010, 173).

Narratives are part of the process of constructing identity, because they help create the shared history that produces collective linkages. They contribute to the creation and construction of memories by giving meaning to certain elements of one's past, such as the origin of a people or the trials, tribulations, and triumphs through history, as well as by defining present fears and goals that can affect current and future political actions. Narratives reflect historical events and portray a sense of identity but are not always factually accurate and often contradict other narratives of the same events. They are inevitably selective—whether through the limits of

an individual's own experience or by choice through deliberately placing emphasis on certain historical/cultural elements and/or omitting others. There are "master narratives," which project a sense of group identity and are attached to dominant cultural perceptions and institutional actions, such as educational and governmental posturing. These often claim to represent "Truth." There are also individual narratives, which reflect how different people and/or groups perceive events and circumstances, which may sometimes challenge the master narrative. Finally, there is the narrative of the Other, which tends to paint the Other as the enemy while denying the Other a voice to express its own multitude of perspectives. Often in intractable conflicts, the master narrative on each "side" negates the narrative of the Other, which serves to perpetuate negative stereotypes.

A narratives approach seeks to unpack the concepts of identity at the heart of intractable conflicts by exploring a multitude of perspectives in relation to each other, while also giving a voice to the Other. This approach allows the student to better understand the complexities of the conflict, as well as break down monolithic perceptions of self and Other by being exposed to the diverse viewpoints of each side, some of which may provide common ground for positive relations to emerge. In addition, the narratives approach helps students to realize that they enter the dialogue with a specific narrative of their own that privileges certain elements over others and is framed by a specific view of the self and the Other, just and unjust, and so forth. The advantage of this approach is that "focusing on narratives can help students set aside questions of right and wrong . . . and instead focus on the explanatory questions essential to understanding how world politics unfold" (Juneau and Sucharov 2010, 173).

Students in OTI take a specially designed core undergraduate class in narratives of the particular conflict that shows how historical events were interpreted differently by the varying parties to the conflict. In addition, the students work with faculty to establish extracurricular educational sessions. This consists of a thirty-week course for the Israel-Palestine program and twenty-week course for the Turkey-Armenia program. Students meet weekly for sixty to seventy-five minutes to listen to lectures given by trained graduate students, faculty, and expert guest lecturers. These extracurricular courses cover the cultural and religious foundations of the

conflict region, closely examine the key historical moments, and explore current debates. Each session consists of a lecture about the required readings, audio files, and/or a movie, followed by an interactive discussion section in which students engage in small or large group discussions. The aim of this preparation course is to teach the students basic knowledge of the conflict from a multinarrative approach while sharpening their critical thinking and dialogue skills.

One of the key challenges of the narratives approach—and this holds true for dialogue programs as well—is to transmit to students the differences in power that often define a conflict. As Leslie Dwyer and Alison Castel note in chapter 2, it is important to be mindful of power differences on the ground. Exposure to different narratives can sometimes lend the impression that all narratives are equal, which would skew the reality. The narratives approach thus needs to equip students with the skill set to critically reflect on the perspectives they hear to distinguish how each narrative fits into the reality—perceived and actual. While OTI's educational sessions are designed to lead students to grasp the relative strength of a specific narrative within a given society and in the general historical context, and the mixed dialogue-group setting ensures critical reflection on the various perspectives heard, classroom learning has its limitations. Creative techniques such as role-playing and the use of films or graphic novels can enhance the educational experience (Caplan et al. 2012), but the classroom ultimately lacks the visceral experience that renders the power dimensions of the conflict tangible. To overcome this shortcoming, the most innovative part of OTI's educational philosophy combines the advantages of the narratives approach with the educational power of study abroad.

Research shows that study abroad provides students with the opportunity for self-reflection (Younes and Asay 2003), increases resistance to stereotyping, promotes tolerance and respect for peoples of different cultures and values (Carlson and Widaman 1988; Laubscher 1994), and helps students to develop intercultural communication skills through contact with different cultures (Williams 2005). Experiential learning programs that include travel abroad have been found to deliver powerful experiences that enhance student learning in ways that book-based and simulation-based learning cannot, by engaging all of their senses and exposing them

to real-world actors (Schnieder and Lonze 2013). The out-of-classroom experience forces students to bridge the gap between theory and practice by balancing the rational and intellectual aspects of classroom learning with the sensorial and emotional experience of visiting the conflict region and meeting people who live there. Inspired by these findings, the OTI curriculum includes a carefully constructed short-term trip (two to three weeks) to the conflict region.

The OTI travel experience also follows the narratives approach. It is designed to be a destabilizing experience that obliges students to perpetually contextualize, problematize, and challenge assertions and assumptions through exposure to the realities outside the comfort zone of their own communities. The itinerary is specifically constructed to engage as many relevant voices as possible by using a speaker matrix to ensure a balanced representation from political, nongovernmental, and grassroots actors across the political spectrum. Students engage leading politicians, chief negotiators, policy experts, members of nongovernmental organizations and citizens movements, religious leaders, community leaders, soldiers,

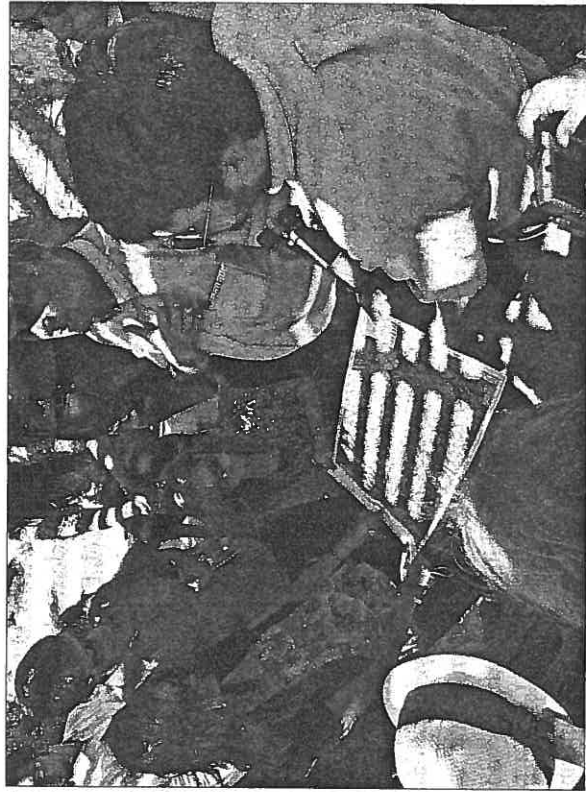


Figure 4.1. Critical discussion of maps and borders of Jerusalem. Daniel Wehrenfennig.

students, and ordinary citizens to develop a deeper understanding of the geopolitical dynamics on the ground. The itinerary constantly challenges students to hear conflicting narratives in order to force them to cross over mental barriers and physical borders almost on a daily basis. During the three-week trip to Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Jordan (a neighboring country added to break down the impression of a binary conflict), students typically engage eighty different speakers in fifteen different cities. On the trip to Turkey and Armenia, students speak with nearly forty speakers in more than ten cities across the region.

Critically, travel to the region exposes students to the power differential between parties to the conflict, shedding light on how this difference affects different people in different ways. An example from a day during the trip to the Middle East illustrates the point. Students visit Bil'in in the West Bank to speak with Palestinians who convene every Friday to protest the construction of a separation barrier, which they assert separates farmers from their land and violates international law. Some of these Friday protests have turned violent, and students hear stories of protesters whose friends and family were killed or injured. Then students cross to the other side of the barrier to speak with Israel Defense Forces soldiers to garner their views, before heading to East Jerusalem where they meet with the Israeli architect of the security barrier, Col. Danny Tirza. On a tour of the barrier, Tirza explains the reasons why the Israeli government tasked him with building it—to prevent suicide bombers from entering Israeli territory during the Second Intifada—and then offers justification as to why the barrier diverges from the Green Line (the 1949 Armistice line of demarcation) in certain places. Immediately after this meeting, the students meet with members of B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization critical of the barrier. With the B'Tselem activists, the students embark on another tour of the barrier, hearing arguments that challenge its legality in certain places under international law. The day concludes with a visit to a Jewish cemetery in Haifa where students meet with a father whose daughter was killed in a suicide bombing during the Second Intifada. The varied meetings encompass a range of narratives along with visual and emotional stimulation. Students see the physical separation between Israelis and Palestinians and witness the power differences but

also encounter the emotions of grief, sorrow, and bitterness on both sides of the barrier.

Experiences such as these stretch students on emotional, physical, and psychological levels, especially those who have personal connections to the region. While the trip is emotionally charged, the extensive preparation of the group beforehand and the focus on dialogue set the groundwork for turning these experiences into powerful moments in the personal development of students. On the trip the students have ample opportunity to exchange ideas in personal conversations with their fellow travelers, with the speakers, and with random individuals during down time. In addition, as others have noted in this volume (for example, in chapters 2 and 10), we recognize that making the space for structured group reflection is essential to student learning. On OTI trips time is set aside each day for a formal group reflection in which students put into practice and hone the dialogue skills they learned before embarking on the trip. To reflect the equal status of all students, seating is in a circle either in one big group or in small groups, with the role of facilitator changing each day.

The group reflections are a fundamental aspect of OTI's experiential learning module because they provide the forum for students to explore the opinions expressed by speakers during the trip and compare them to what they had learned in the classroom setting. Moreover, in these discussions, students learn what their peers view to be important for their "side" and what others perceive to be propaganda, offensive, or divergent from what previous speakers have said. Students also gain experience listening to others and formulating their own arguments with a more critical eye, while respecting the identity and perceptions of those who hold different views. A good example of this is the discussion following the visit to the Genocide Memorial in Yerevan during the 2013 OTI trip with the Turkey-Armenia branch. Students felt safe and prepared to express their deepest feelings about a place that is powerfully symbolic to Armenian students but troubling to Turkish students. Another example from the same trip is the informative discussion students had after meeting with some representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Istanbul. This discussion introduced the group to the complexity of minority politics in Turkey and brought to the forefront myriad reactions and opinions about



broadier themes such as the tensions of democracy, identity, and life in the diaspora.

These conversations and other less formal conversations that occur when students have free time contribute to the development of student dialogue skills by exposing flashpoints where dialogue breaks down and revealing common ground where dialogue can be renewed.

### *Leadership Development: A Holistic Approach to Experiential Education*

The shared experience of travel to the region, enhanced by the daily ritual of group reflection, is an important part of breaking down stereotypes, leaving pre-trip preconceptions and prejudices behind, and developing empathy for the Other. The literature, however, suggests that these positive effects tend to diminish once participants return to their own communities and do not continue to engage each other on a regular basis (Abu-Nimer 2004). In order to counteract this tendency, the OTI program is designed to preserve the special bond of learning and respectful interaction between the participants developed before and during the trip through a long-term holistic leadership development approach. This approach combines insights gathered over the last ten years on how students learn, process, retain, and implement three types of knowledge: intellectual, experiential, and emotional.

Despite the changing political situation, student backgrounds, and conflicts, we have identified a learning cycle underlying the leadership development process. Reflecting the need to integrate experiential learning programs into the university curriculum as discussed by Allyson M. Lowe and Sandi DiMola in chapter 6, OTI is divided into three structured segments or phases of learning embedded in the conflict analysis and resolution certificate, which is housed in the international studies program at UC Irvine. After the students are selected from a larger pool of applicants, the first learning phase consists of the intellectual and knowledge development about the respective conflict studied. This initial phase is followed by the experiential learning trip to the region. The post-trip phase back home is designed to provide the context for students to process this

experience—what we call finding their own story—and then apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired to their local community and beyond. It is important to note that leadership development occurs throughout the entire educational process, with each phase contributing to the students' development.

To best support the students in all of these learning stages and to further their leadership development, we have developed a number of practices, academic structures, and support networks.

#### PRE-TRIP LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The pre-trip leadership development phase is focused on student empowerment. Before the trip, faculty train students to be facilitators of group discussions, to organize on-campus programming, to fundraise, and to cooperate with the faculty in the process of building the itinerary for the trip. Students actively learn to work individually and as part of a team. Part of the process involves students taking responsibility for all the events they organize, which requires working together and thus sharing credit for successful events as well as responsibility for the less successful. We face many of the challenges discussed by Gina M. Cerasani and rj nickels in chapter 9 when it comes to defining the role of faculty and walking the fine line between providing support and allowing for failure. While it is difficult for mentoring faculty to watch events unfold imperfectly, we nevertheless find that students gain valuable lessons from their individual and collective failures. During this preparation phase, students are made aware of their individual and collective strengths and, through individual mentoring from faculty, are challenged to work on their weaknesses. The mentoring role of faculty requires getting to know the students through close observation during pre-trip education and planning and developing a trusting relationship in order to communicate observations and suggestions throughout the program. For example, faculty may need to encourage particular students to speak up more or to hold back, to show more emotional constraint or to engage their emotions more deeply, to take more leadership or let other people shine as well, to manage their time better, to stay motivated through moments of frustration, to lead by example, and to learn to motivate others.

## ON-THE-TRIP LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The main leadership development during the trip comes as a consequence of the group members having to stick with each other over the duration of an emotional and politically charged travel experience, all the while working through their personal and intellectual challenges. Many students have expressed that being in a conflict-laden situation for an extended time was a new experience that forced them to deal with multiple pressures—physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual—all at the same time. Students cite the fact that they could not simply walk away from these pressures as hugely important in the learning experience. On the trip students have to deal with the physical and mental fatigue of a grueling schedule, process the sometimes tragic or offensive narratives they encounter, grapple with other students “pushing their buttons,” and come to terms with continually being confronted with information and experiences that challenge their own frameworks and preconceived notions. This experience of having past knowledge challenged is, as Patricia A. Maulden and Lisa Elaine Shaw argue in chapter 7, a catalyst for considerable learning to take place.

During or, more often than not, after intense conversations with their peers, students have to relearn the skills needed to sustain dialogue and resolve controversial issues (e.g., to agree to disagree). We have noticed that while students try to be very rational in the beginning of the trip—for example during the initial phase of the Middle East trip in Washington, DC, or when students visit key US-based diaspora populations prior to the Turkey-Armenia trip—almost inevitably the intensity grows when the group arrives in the conflict region, resulting in very emotional discussions during the first days in the region. The mood of students tends to change from reserved and reflective to reactive and emotional to angry and entitled. However, over the course of the trip, as each day exposes the students to the on-the-ground complexity, the discussions slowly morph.

By the last days of the trip, reflections have, experience shows, produced some of the most honest, productive, and insightful conversations one can imagine. Knowing this process, we require the students to journal about their experience throughout the study-abroad phase in order to trace their own changes and development and to help them better share

their thoughts during in-group reflection, as well as back in their communities upon returning home.

The role of the staff/faculty during this process is to help the vocal and opinionated students become better listeners while inspiring the quiet and more overwhelmed students to share their thoughts and to take a stronger leadership role. This is accomplished during one-on-one discussions with individual students on the bus or on walks in the cities the group visits. For the vocal students, challenging them to compare a speaker they just heard with what was said by a previous speaker, or one of their peers, helps them to grasp nuance while articulating more clearly the broader context. For the shy students, simply asking what they think about a particular speaker and listening without judging helps them to grow in confidence and formulate what they might contribute to the group discussions.

## POST-TRIP LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

While the trip itself is the most impactful learning and education moment of the OTI program, the learning process continues well beyond the experience abroad. We have found that the biggest challenge for the growth of personal leadership is continuing student learning after returning to campus. Part of the challenge reflects the observation made by Maryam Z. Deloffe in chapter 8, namely that of assessing whether the learning before and during the trip actually prepares students for the job market in related fields. We find that working systematically with students upon their return helps them to continue processing the experience and, in doing so, to fully realize what they learned, what skills they developed (and what weaknesses they still have), and how they have grown emotionally and intellectually. This self-introspection is key to bridging the gap between the educational experience and tackling real-world problems as a career professional. To this end, we seek to provide a post-trip structure for student engagement with the issues on the campus and in their communities while they continue to improve their personal leadership skills and preserve the trust and relationships developed with their travel companions.

Most conflict resolution programs provoke major changes in participants when they are part of the learning group but cite challenges when it comes to preserving these changes over a longer period of time. Based

on our experience, we have identified two main issues that challenge the continuing leadership development. First, there is the "push-back" effect when participants return and try to explain their experiences to their families, friends, and community peers. Returning students often recount that their inner circle is more interested to hear how their preconceived opinions have been confirmed and less interested to hear where they may have been challenged. Some recount that they find their friends and family lack the knowledge or experience to even comprehend their experience in a meaningful way. In addition, sometimes interlocutors try to convince the returning students that their experiences have been incomplete, wrongly interpreted, or even go so far to suggest—as happens to many conflict resolution programs—that students have been brainwashed.

Second, after such an intense experience, students experience a natural "distancing" from the core conflict issues and express the need for space to reflect on their experiences and to acclimate to their normal routines back on campus. For most students this only takes a week or two before they seek occasions to spend time with their traveling companions, but for some it can take longer before they are able or willing to engage again.

Taking into account these challenges, we have developed a multistep approach to help students "find their story" and remain engaged. The first step is to create a "safe" space for students to process their experiences. The safe space can include formal meetings with other students or informal meetings with faculty members or OTI board members. The second step is to prepare a speech illustrating elements of what they have learned during their trip, which they present to their campus peers at the annual welcome-back event. Following the presentation to the campus, students are required to make three presentations in the community at local mosques, temples, churches, high schools, or other community venues. These experiences help students to connect all their experiences with the education they received, while training them to communicate their personal experiences and articulate their individual opinions on key issues to others. By speaking to different communities, including those who might hold alternative opinions, students experience firsthand the challenges of communication across ideological lines. Moreover, public speaking can enhance a student's sense of empowerment. As one undergraduate student

observed, giving presentations was a powerful experience. For this student, the opportunity to speak to large audiences of adults, to be listened to, and to engage in conversation afterward stimulated greater self-confidence and was a motivating factor in taking on more active leadership roles.

The third required stage is to turn their speeches into an academic article to be published in a campus journal. This requires students to undertake further research on their chosen topic, thus helping them to develop academic research skills while transforming them from consumers of information into producers of knowledge (cf. Juneau and Sucharov 2010, 180). Through the process, students receive support, critical feedback, and debriefing from their peers and faculty mentors.

The fourth element of the leadership and development process is a post-trip course in scholarship and leadership development taught by a faculty mentor. The focus of the course is on teaching students how to transfer the skills they have acquired—for example, critical thinking, communication, working as a team, and leadership—to their professional and personal development. There are two elements to the class. First, students volunteer with an off-campus organization that is not specifically related to the conflict they studied. Taking a step back from the conflict provides a positive outlet—often a sharp contrast to the resentment and challenges they face when sharing their trip experiences with their own community—in which students can utilize their personal leadership skills. Such a positive outlet provides continuing motivation for students to realize their own potential and to further consolidate the life skills they have developed in the program. Second, students undertake a capstone project related to the conflict. Examples include a photo exhibit, a film festival, mock peace negotiations, roundtable discussions, poster presentations, research projects, and so forth. In undertaking such projects, students revisit the challenges related to organizing events, motivating peers to participate, and communicating complex ideas to diverse audience members but with a more advanced knowledge base and skill set than when they began the program.

The final element of the leadership development phase sees the students personally invest in the educational process. The students who have gone through the program are given the responsibility of recruiting and

training the next cohort of students. In addition, students become part of a connected alumni network in which there is continued close mentorship by faculty and ongoing camaraderie among student travelers of multiple cohorts that furthers their intellectual and professional development. Students have the chance to share their frustrations, work through the inevitable push-back, discuss current events, and continue to grow together through a specially designed online forum called Olive-Talk and at biannual student retreats where students from multiple campuses meet. The ultimate goal of the alumni network is to connect OTI students after graduation, thus creating a web of young leaders who, despite their differing political views, share a common educational experience that grounds them in a global outlook based on the view that mutual understanding is the most intractable of conflicts is possible.

OTI is an innovative educational program that has the potential to expose generations of students to the theoretical foundations and real-world challenges of conflict resolution. This chapter described the educational vision of OTI that has allowed it to grow to a system-wide program in the University of California, thus expanding its educational impact well beyond individual classrooms. OTI's educational philosophy is based on an innovative model of experiential learning that provides the educational grounding for students to have informed and constructive discussions related to intractable conflicts, while empowering them in their scholarship and individual leadership development. Having spread to multiple additional California campuses and at the University of Glasgow, OTI can help create a network of future leaders who have a shared understanding of and experience in conflict resolution. The program is designed to train students as future leaders to think about the Middle East and the Caucasus—or any conflict region—in more complex ways by steering clear of falling into easy stereotypes, by thinking critically, and by engaging others with different views in constructive dialogue.

The program is unique because it expands the classroom abroad by leading groups of students on an intense experiential learning trip that

exposes them to the raw essence of politics and international relations by providing them unprecedented access to the political actors in the region who influence public policy and decision-making. It does so in a structured environment with close mentoring of students to help them harness their experience for personal and intellectual growth.

Future challenges include evaluating the short-term and long-term successes of the program. We have developed an evaluation protocol that includes pre-trip and post-trip interviews and questionnaires to measure the changes in students over time. Preliminary results point to significant increases in knowledge about the conflict and greater perspective empathy toward the Other, accompanied by decreases in ethnic and religious prejudice.

The continuation of the Israel-Palestine and Turkey-Armenia programs demonstrates that the model is applicable to multiple conflicts. A comparative analysis of the programs may yield important insights into the way in which the model applies to different conflicts, as well as potential shortcomings that would need to be ironed out. In the future, we envision employing the model in additional areas of intractable conflict, including India-Pakistan and Northern Ireland, to empower students to become future leaders with a vision for the future based in the power of dialogue and the importance of engaging with and trying to understand the multiple narratives of one's own community and those of the Other.

#### Note

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