

BRIDGE-BUILDER



BY JENNIFER PEPNECK

MAUREEN FLAHERTY'S FIRST VISIT TO UKRAINE IN 2000 REPRESENTED A "TURNING POINT" IN HER LIFE.

She'd been invited to teach a social work course at the Lviv Polytechnic National University (LPNU) in Lviv, Ukraine. The course was part of the Canadian International Development Agency project titled Reforming Social Services: Canada-Ukraine. Eventually, her experience led her to a career in peace and conflict research.

“WHEN I MET THEM, my colleagues in Ukraine were trying to work through the next steps forward with democracy including reforming and building social services,” she explains.

“When I left Ukraine and the work I was doing there, I vowed to continue to work with these people,” she says. “We looked for projects that we could work on together.”

Flaherty returned to Winnipeg to complete her PhD in Peace and Conflict studies at St. Paul’s College, at the University of Manitoba, the first doctoral program of its kind and one of only few programs like it in the world. “I finished my PhD in Peace and Conflict studies based on research conducted in collaboration with the people I met in Ukraine. That first trip to Ukraine ... was really life changing for me,” says Flaherty.

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Now her research brings together the volunteers, NGO workers, government groups and academics working with internally-displaced people and already-present community members to address different community needs. She helps people collaborate on research to make connections and better understand their common world, supporting the development of democracy and peace and conflict education halfway across the globe.

In December, Flaherty travelled to Ukraine to further develop their research program by adding Participatory Action Research a collective, self-reflective inquiry process to understand and empower people with increased control over their lives in educational institutions, supported by Academics Without Borders (AWB), an organization that fosters post-secondary education in countries around the world. Working with faculty members at Lviv Polytechnic, she facilitated a five day AWB participatory research workshop, ‘Building Community Capacity through Participatory Research’, to inform the development of a culturally appropriate research course for graduate students.

The objective of the AWB workshop is to bring together people from different parts of the country in conflict to do research and work on a common problem. Workshop exercises and participating in research allows participants to know each other better and start to build



ABOVE: Maureen Flaherty, assistant professor in peace and conflict studies.

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bridges in and between their communities.

“A lot of the organizations involved know each other but they don’t often have the time to stop and get together and look at common concerns. How we might meet both agendas, further develop community and assess what the community needs while at the same time help the university develop its research agenda,” says Flaherty.

The research workshops help people to learn more about their own groups and others. For example, one exercise requires them to do parts of a needs assessment

together. Participants decide on research questions, the data they will collect and how they will do it. Often participants in the workshop see potential in the information for further collaborative research. At the end of the workshop, participants complete a survey about what they found most useful. The survey results will be used as the foundation for Flaherty and other academics at LPNU to further develop the research course for students.

Summarizing the outcomes of her work, Flaherty says, “The research helps people ask questions and develop tools that will assist them to understand and live better in their own environments, enabling participants to connect better with the people around them.

“Most of the work I do is about bringing diverse communities together to find out about their common questions and concerns—bridge building between these different groups,” she adds.

“It is a real privilege.”



HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

WINNIPEG AND MANITOBA have a deep history of social justice and human rights activism. As the home of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and with national and international attention focused on the Calls to Actions from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the university is well placed to lead research, scholarly work and creative activities for human rights and engagement in Indigenous communities.

University researchers engage extensively with knowledge development and dissemination, and are responsive to the growing field of Indigenous self-determination, a part of which is the revitalization, growth and celebration of Indigenous worldviews, knowledge, languages and practices.

Hundreds of university researchers on human rights and social justice cross departmental and disciplinary boundaries. These collaborations find a home in and are supported by the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice; the Centre for Professional and Applied Ethics; the Centre for Human Rights Research; RESOLVE; the Manitoba First Nations Centre for Aboriginal Health Research; the Centre for Environmental Health Equity; the Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute; and the Canadian Journal of Human Rights.

The university has Canada’s first and only doctoral program in Peace and Conflict Studies, which seeks to prepare leaders in the many contexts that encompass peace and conflict locally, nationally and internationally.

On December 8th, alumnus Arthur Mauro, OC, OM, QC, [BA/49, LLB/53, LLM/56, LD/87] announced a \$5 million gift from the Mauro Family Foundation to the university’s Front and Centre Campaign. The funds will be used to endow a cross-faculty Chair in Human Rights and Social Justice and support local and international peace-building initiatives.