Pursuing peace is the highest priority facing humanity. As the world moves toward increasing uncertainty, dissention, division, and obstruction, The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace focuses on generating knowledge about a sustainable process toward global peace. Aware of the many societal distractions that trigger fragmentation and animosity between nations and people, the Bahá’í Chair engages in discourse centered on constructive ideas and perspectives that point the way to shared values and positive pathways toward developing an equitable and just social order.

This is not an easy undertaking. Especially when discourse is absent, civility has vanished and ideological polarization resembles team sports. Advocating for peace in a divided world is the central mission of The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace. Searching for the solutions to intractable social problems is the highest aim of the Bahá’í Chair. Through our courses, research, lectures, symposia, conferences, community outreach, and national and international connections we are actively engaged in promoting a vision for world peace that takes into consideration the safety, health, and happiness of every person in every corner of the world.

Since 2012, our extraordinary series on Structural Racism and the Root Causes of Prejudice has featured close to thirty of the leading national and international scholars who explore solutions to the elimination of racial prejudice. Every academic year the Chair hosts three to four interdisciplinary presentations on structural racism. The lectures are well-attended by students, faculty, administrators and staff at the University of Maryland, but are also open and free to the public.

Our 2018 Annual Lecture held on September 20 featured Jabari Mahiri, Professor of Education at the University of California, Berkeley, whose research re-examines the unscientific basis of “race” as a construct. Speaking to an audience of 370 people, Dr. Mahiri argued that it is time to transcend the “black-white binary” and to break out of what he refers to as “the color bind.” Describing numerous ethnographic interviews, Dr. Mahiri explored how transcending the standard categorization of people by race would liberate people to construct identities that are rooted in science and their authentic selves - their “micro-cultural identities” - which he regards as genuine, fluid, and complex.

Our series on Frontiers of Global Governance and Leadership explores the challenges faced by systems of governance and the role and responsibilities of elected officials. On October 16 and 17, 2018, the Bahá’í Chair
hosted a conference about global peace and security. Fifteen speakers from around the world participated in the conference. Through talks and panel discussions, the conference focused on five themes critical to understanding the challenge of global peace and security: leadership and governance, peace and technology, gender equality, human nature, and structural inequalities. The speakers highlighted some of the steps needed to help create global peace and security. As Severine Autesserre, a political science professor at Columbia University, noted: “to end violence from war we have to change the way we view and build peace”. The need for greater equality and deeper cooperation was emphasized by Professor Craig Murphy of Wellesley College, and echoed by Professor Valentine Moghadam of Northeastern University who argued that “increasing gender equality is expected to have cascading effects on security, stability, and resilience within a country as well as internationally.” Professor Sheryl Lightfoot of the University of British Columbia also highlighted the continuing impact of historical inequalities, when she argued that “it’s not the societies that are at issue. It’s the old colonial doctrines and practices and discourses and the ways of doing business that have to be eradicated and redesigned.”

I hope that conference attendees gained insights about how peace and knowledge are such important catalysts for transforming individuals, society, and ultimately the world. Those who view the conference videos will certainly benefit as well. The videos are available on our website at www.bahaichair.umd.edu/video

In the coming years, the Bahá’í Chair at the University of Maryland is eager to expand its work: increasing the numbers of publications, events on and off campus, and engagement with the wider community. Sustaining an academic program as unique and vital as the Bahá’í Chair is an important undertaking in a world that is increasingly divided. Additional resources are needed to promote the unique process of peace building advanced by the Chair. In order to achieve success in our vital mission, please consider donating and supporting the important work of the Bahá’í Chair.

Thank You

Hoda Mahmoudi
The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace
The Ethical Foundations of Human Rights Conference

MARCH 2018

This conference brought together leading thinkers from across disciplines to explore the ethical foundations of human rights in the 21st century. Underlying the discussion was an exploration of some of the more challenging philosophical and practical questions that have come into view as human rights thinkers have sought to translate the ideals that are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into action.

Alison Brysk, Duncan and Suzanne Mellichamp Professor of Global Governance, University of California Santa Barbara

Raimond Gaita, Professorial Fellow Melbourne Law School and Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy at King’s College London

Samuel Kerstein, Professor of Philosophy, University of Maryland

Karol Soltan, Associate Professor in the Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland

Pictured:
1. From Left to Right: Karol Soltan, Samuel Kerstein, Alison Brysk, Hoda Mahmoudi, Raimond Gaita, Michael Penn

2. Professor Mahmoudi with the Bahá’í Chair for World Peace Interns at the Phillips Gallery, From Left to Right: Alawi Masud, Andrew Pommersheim, Hoda Mahmoudi, Emily Gorey, Ashli Taylor

3. Jen Golbeck, University of Maryland, speaking at the event

4. Margaret Sullivan, The Washington Post, speaking at the event

5. Dan Russell, Google’s Director of User Happiness speaking at the event
The Future of Facts in a Post-Truth World

MAY 2018

How can we trust our world in the face of efforts to undermine traditional sources of information ... in a time when citizens raise serious concerns about what truth is and who tells it? That question was explored on May 15, 2018, in a program organized by the Future of Information Alliance at The Phillips Collection as part of the University of Maryland’s partnership with the museum. The program featured Margaret Sullivan of the Washington Post, whose columns have delved into issues around trust in traditional media; Jen Golbeck, a University of Maryland professor who researches organized efforts on social media to spread misinformation; and Jevin West, who teaches students at the University of Washington to navigate a world where misleading data lurk in surprisingly familiar places. The moderator was Dan Russell, who, as Google’s “director of user happiness,” researches ways that people search the web and teaches them how to do it better.

Co-Sponsored with Future of Information Alliance

Margaret Sullivan, The Washington Post
Jen Golbeck, University of Maryland
Jevin West, University of Washington
Dan Russell, Google’s “director of user happiness”
On September 20, 2018, Jabari Mahiri, a professor at the University of California Berkeley, gave the Bahá’í Chair Annual Lecture, entitled “Deconstructing Race / Reconstructing Difference.” The lecture focused on how to break away from binding racial categories and instead celebrate more nuanced identities.

Speaking before an audience of 370 faculty, administrators, students, and guests, he argued that it is time to transcend the “black-white binary” and to break out of what he calls “the color bind.” Race artificially and falsely categorizes people and compels them to “perform” according to their race group, he explained. These categories create a hierarchy of status based on race and reinforced by social forces and institutions, allowing injustice and oppression to persist.

Professor Jabari Mahiri presenting the Bahá’í Chair for World Peace Annual Lecture 2018

Audience at the Annual Lecture 2018

Professor Hoda Mahmoudi, and Professor Wilma King at the dinner honoring Professor Mahiri prior to the lecture
Peace and Security Conference

OCTOBER 2018

Future Of Humanity: The Challenge Of Global Peace and Security Conference

The pursuit of global peace and security requires a transformation in the systems of global governance and the power dynamics that define them today. It demands the participation of all segments of humanity.

These conclusions were voiced across a wide range of presentations at the Bahá’í Chair for World Peace conference about global peace and security—held on the 16th and 17th of October 2018.

“The pursuit of peace must be sustained indefinitely because the barriers are big and complex,” says Hoda Mahmoudi, holder of the Bahá’í Chair. “We have to bring new thinking into this process. We have to raise consciousness about this complex endeavor. We have to bring more like-minded people together to explore the ideas and essential strategies.”

Speakers

Michael H. Allen, Chair and Professor of Political Science, Bryn Mawr College

Derek Caelin, Innovation Specialist, Counterpart International

Simon Dalby, CIGI Chair in the Political Economy of Climate Change, Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies Balsillie School of International Affairs, Wilfred Laurier University

Jennifer Hadden, Associate Professor, Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland

W. Andy Knight, Professor of Political Science, University of Alberta

Charlotte Ku, Professor of Law and Associate Dean of International Programs, Texas A&M University

Sheryl Lightfoot, Canada Research Chair in Global Indigenous Rights and Politics, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia

Valentine Moghadam, Professor, Sociology and International Affairs; Director, Middle East Studies Program, Northeastern University

Maude Morrison, Program Manager, Build UP

Craig Murphy, Betty Freyhof Johnson ’44 Professor of Political Science, Wellesley College

Margarita Quihuis, Co-Director, Peace Innovation Lab

Nanjira Sambuli, Senior Policy Manager, World Wide Web Foundation

Jessica Trisko Darden, Assistant Professor, School of International Service, American University

Professor Hoda Mahmoudi and Ms. Margarita Quihuis, Co-Director of the Peace Innovation Lab at Stanford University, following her keynote presentation at the conference
Ms. Nanjira Sambuli, Senior Policy Manager, World Wide Web Foundation, giving her presentation on Digital Technology’s Intersections with Global Peace and Security

Professor Craig Murphy, Betty Freyhof Johnson ’44 Professor of Political Science, Wellesley College, giving his keynote presentation on Necessary Egalitarianism

Professor Charlotte Ku, Professor of Law and Associate Dean of International Programs, Texas A&M University, giving her presentation on Responding to Global Threats: The United Nations Security Council and the Challenges of Global Security
Aggression, Testosterone and the Biological Basis of Behavior

Many people assume that biological variables determine behavior in an immutable manner. Such inflexibility is thought to be a constraint on behavioral change thus discouraging societies in attaining certain goals. These ideas are related to the notion that there is a Human Nature that limits us. While there is no question that all behavior ultimately has a biological basis of some sort, there is a causal web involving biological variables such as genes, hormones and nervous system activity that is profoundly modified by experience and culture. Studies of testosterone and aggression in human and non-human animals illustrate how there is not a simple link between a hormone and a behavioral outcome but rather that it occurs in a social and behavioral context that affects whether testosterone is secreted and whether it regulates aggressive behavior. The effects of social context and experience also have profound effects on gene expression and neural function both during development and in adulthood. Understanding the role played by biological variables can help think about behavioral change but should not be viewed as impediments to facilitating behavioral plasticity especially as it relates to issues such as aggression and competition.

More Than a Pretty Picture: The Potential for Art and Design to Create Positive Social Change

The world is filled with seemingly endless conflict and deeply rooted problems. Positive change can seem out of reach. However, art and design have both the potential to communicate societal issues and prompt transformation in our social understandings and interactions. This presentation used a social science research lens to show how a range of art and design projects are creating positive social change.
March 28, 2018

The Ethical Foundations of Human Rights Conference

Dr. Alison Brysk
Dr. Raimond Gaita
Dr. Samuel J. Kerstein
Dr. Karol Soltan
Dr. Michael Penn

See page 4 for more details.

April 16, 2018

Changing the World, One Wall at a Time: A Film Screening

Changing the World, One Wall at a Time tells the story of Education Is Not A Crime – one of the world’s largest street art and human rights campaign to raise awareness of education discrimination by Iran’s government against tens of thousands of young Baha’is.

The film features interviews with popular street artists from around the world – as well as activists with experience of the Civil Rights movement, the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa, and human rights work on behalf of Iranians of all backgrounds. Iranian Baha’is with personal experience of being denied their right to higher education also share their stories.

The Screening was followed by a panel discussion with, Dr. La Marr Jurelle Bruce, Assistant Professor of American Studies, UMD, College Park, Audra Buck-Coleman, Associate Professor and Graphic Design Program Director at the University of Maryland, College Park, and Dr. Catherine Knight Steele, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, UMD, College Park.
April 18, 2018

Race and Wealth Inequality: Examining Shades of Opportunity

Co-Sponsored Parren J. Mitchell Symposium with The Critical Race Initiative Symposium with Critical Race Initiative of the Department of Sociology and others.

Cedric Herring, Professor of Sociology & Public Policy, a Hrabowski Innovation Fellow, and Director of the Language Literacy, and Culture PhD Program, University of Maryland Baltimore County

Thomas Shapiro, Director, Institute on Assets and Social Policy and the Pokross Professor of Law & Social Policy at the Heller School for Social Policy, Brandeis University

Loren Henderson, Assistant Professor of Sociology & Public Policy, Hrabowski Innovation Fellow, University of Maryland Baltimore County

Louise Seamster, Postdoctoral Teaching Associate, University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Will Jawando, Co-Leader of the African-American Student Achievement Action, Founder of Our Voices Matter, Maryland, and Co-Founder, African Immigrant Caucus

Judy Dlamini, Founder & Executive Chairman, Mbekani Group

Monty Cooper, Lawyer, Crowell & Moring, LLP

Gary Rozier, Senior Vice President of Institutional Marketing, Ariel Investments

Tonia Wellons, Vice President, Greater Washington Community Foundation

David C. Harrington, President & CEO, Prince George’s Chamber of Commerce

Sandy Darity, Samuel DuBois Cook Professor of Public Policy, African American Studies, and Economics, Duke University

Tyson Brown, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Director of the Center for Biobehavioral Health Disparities Research, Duke University

Darrick Hamilton, Professor of Economics and Urban Policy, The New School of Social Research, New School in New York
When Civil Resistance Succeeds. Building Democracy After Popular Nonviolent Uprisings

Why do some nonviolent revolutions lead to successful democratization while others fail to consolidate democratic change? And what can activists do to push toward a victory over dictatorship that results in long-term political freedom?

Several studies show that nonviolent revolutions are generally a more positive force for democratization than violent revolutions and top-down political transitions. However, many nonviolent revolutions, such as the Arab Spring revolution in Egypt, do not seem to fit this pattern. This study takes on this puzzle and reveals that the answer lies in large part in the actions of civil society prior to and during transition. Democracy is most likely when activists can keep their social bases mobilized for positive political change while directing that mobilization toward building new political institutions.

The Future of Humanity: The Challenge of Global Peace and Security

With increasing challenges to the creation of a sustainable global Peace and the decline in security, new thinking and solutions are needed. This conference examines the limitations of the current global order and seeks to explore alternative solutions. This conference examined key themes concerning the peace and security of the nations and peoples of the world. See Page 7 for more.

Annual Lecture: Deconstructing Race/Reconstructing Difference: Beyond the U.S. Paradigm

In this moment of a turn to identity politics in the United States, mitigating the detrimental impacts of ideologies and hierarchies predicated on the idea of race is ever more important.

Although race is not a scientific fact, it is a social fact that operates through ascribed categories anchored in a white/black binary with other color-coded categories capriciously placed in between. These structures not only accentuate difference; they also sew division. Based on a conceptual framework of “micro-cultures” drawn from analyses of extensive, ethnographic interviews with people who are socially defined within each of the five main, ascribed racial categories in the U.S., this presentation argued for ways to move beyond the severe limitations of current narratives of race and difference. It further argues that the role of education is imperative in understanding the complexities and contradictions of how race and difference are enacted and also critical for challenging and progressively changing these social constructions in the U.S. and internationally. See Page 6 for more.
Symposium: Be the Solution: Interrogating Structural Racism

Social institutions have the power to either enable or restrict individual agency and opportunity toward a better life. Structural racism is one such inhibitor of institutionalized “practices and behaviors that produce a racial structure—a network of social relations at social, political, economic, and ideological levels that shapes the life chances of various races.” Structural racism harms people, maintains division between racial groups, and minimizes social justice. What actions can social institutions and individuals take to become the solution to structural racism? This symposium discussed these questions by interrogating structural racism and promoting an interchange of ideas between panel speakers and the audience.

Hoda Mahmoudi, Chair and Research Professor, The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace

Rashawn Ray, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Maryland

La Marr Jurelle Bruce, Assistant Professor of American Studies, University of Maryland

Tamara Copeland, President, Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers

Professor Mahmoudi with the symposium participants from left to right: Tamara Copeland, La Marr Jurelle Bruce, Hoda Mahmoudi, Rashawn Ray
The Problem of Prejudice: Overcoming Impediments to Global Peace and Justice

HON279L

Every fall semester, the Honors Seminar “The Problem of Prejudice: Overcoming Impediments to Global Peace and Justice” is offered to undergraduates. The course surveys interdisciplinary scholarly research and popular cultural conversations about the root causes of prejudice and discrimination. Students are expected to examine empirical evidence and formulate their own views about the impact that all forms of prejudice impose on the human condition and the role it has played in their own life. Based on research evidence, the course encourages the search for solutions to the blight of prejudice.

As part of their final grade students in the class create unique projects to tackle prejudice. Some of these projects can be viewed at the following website links:

Religious Discrimination  
bit.ly/bc-rel

Disability at UMD  
bit.ly/bc-dis

Institutionalized Racism  
bit.ly/bc-inst

Prejudice in the Education System  
bit.ly/bc-prej

Appreciation over Appropriation  
bit.ly/bc-endapp

Global Governance or World Government? What is needed to make the world more peaceful?

HON299K

Every spring semester, Dr. Kate Seaman, Assistant Director to The Bahá’í Chair teaches an Honors Seminar “Global Governance or World Government? What is needed to make the world more peaceful?” By examining a wide range of scholarly research and relevant case studies, the course encourages students to look for alternative solutions to some of the big challenges facing the world today.

Dr. Seaman’s class undertaking a visual network creation activity in Spring 2018
National and International Conferences

2018

ISA Annual Conference, San Francisco
April 2018

Roundtable: What Comes Next?
Rethinking the Liberal Order

Sheryl Lightfoot, University of British Columbia
Jeff D. Colgan, Brown University
Hoda Mahmoudi, University of Maryland
Kate Seaman, University of Maryland

ISA-FLACSO Conference, Quito Ecuador
July 2018


Kate Seaman and Hoda Mahmoudi

ISA North-East Annual Conference, Baltimore
November 2018

Panel: The Ethics of Human Rights in a Digital World

Hoda Mahmoudi, University of Maryland
Kate Seaman, University of Maryland
Matthew S. Weinert, University of Delaware
Stefanie R. Fishel, University of Alabama
Jennifer Whitten-Woodring, University of Massachusetts Lowell
Nicole Anderson, University of Massachusetts Lowell

National and International Speaking Engagements

2018

On the national and international fronts, the Bahá’í Chair has engaged in the following activities:

Roundtable at Center for Strategic and International Studies
May 2018

Dr. Mahmoudi was invited to participate in a roundtable at CSIS on “The Spiritual Dimension to Economic Development”.

7th Annual Arab American Conference
August 2018

Dr. Mahmoudi was invited to present at the Arab American Annual Conference. The theme of the conference was Unity in Diversity and Dr. Mahmoudi presented a talk entitled Global Peace in a Diverse World: Understanding the Challenges and Searching for Solutions.

Santa Monica Bahá’í Center
October 2018

Pushing for Peace in a Divided World: A Conversation with The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace

At this event, Dr. Mahmoudi discussed the work of the Chair, the challenges to global peace, and the ways in which we can all contribute to creating a more just and peaceful society.
About The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace

The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland is an endowed academic program that advances interdisciplinary examination and discourse on global peace. While drawing certain initial insights from religion, the program aims to develop a sound scientific basis for knowledge and strategies that lead to the creation of a better world.

Giving to the Chair

The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland welcomes your support in raising awareness about its important and timely mission in examining pathways to peace. As a self-supporting academic program, the Bahá’í Chair for World Peace is grateful for and appreciates contributions of any amount in support of its activities. Please make your check for the Bahá’í Chair payable to the University System of Maryland Foundation, Inc., and also include “Bahá’í Chair Operating Fund” on the memo line. More information is available at bahaichair.umd.edu/giving.