

Bahá'í Chair Receives Record-Breaking Support for Timely Campus Discussions

IN SEPTEMBER, **Dr. Hoda Mahmoudi**—the incumbent of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace—and Dean **Gregory Ball** were presented with nearly \$250,000 from **Kenneth Bowers**, secretary-general of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, on behalf of the organization. This generous donation supported the Bahá'í Chair's operations for the 2017–18 academic year.

That same evening, **Dr. Valerie Hudson** of Texas A&M University presented a talk focusing on how the development of male–female relations in society affects nation–state level phenomena, including food security, economic prosperity, and conflict. Dr. Hudson, along with three colleagues, has created the largest extant database on the status of women in the world today.

Later in September, **Dr. Nicole Hirschfelder** of Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, Germany, discussed the language and terminology used in relation to refugees, and the underlying, problematic implications of this terminology.

As part of the Bahá'í Chair's Structural Racism and Root Causes of Prejudice lecture series, **Dr. Sheri Parks**, director of UMD's Arts and Humanities Center for Synergy, gave a presentation on the Western cultural conceptualization of darkness, as exhibited in old and new mythologies, and how it has created a foundation and rationale for racial marginalization of people described as “dark.”

Dr. Mehnaz M. Afridi of Manhattan College closed out the fall lecture series in October with “Muslims and the Holocaust: Reconciliation and Hope.”

In February, Dean **Gregory Ball** presented “Aggression, Testosterone and the Biological Basis of Behavior.” Using research from his work with bird species in his lab, Ball discussed how human and animal behavior is—and is not—driven by biology.

Later in the spring, **Dr. Audra Buck Coleman**, director of UMD's Graphic Design Program, discussed how the arts can impact social discussion and understanding.

In March, the Bahá'í Chair convened global thought leaders across many disciplines for its Ethical Foundations of Human Rights Conference at UMD. The daylong event featured presentations by **Dr. Alison Brysk** of the University of California, **Dr. Raimond Gaita** of the University of Melbourne, and **Dr. Samuel J. Kerstein** and **Dr. Karol Soltan** of UMD.



Professor Hoda Mahmoudi, left, with guest speaker Dr. Valerie Hudson.

“Human rights have become increasingly codified, in both national and international legal systems. While debates have focused on what types of rights should be codified—political rights, social rights, economic rights, and even environmental rights—less attention has been paid to examining the ethical foundations of the concept of human rights,” Mahmoudi said. “Our conference sheds light on this complex and deeply important issue.”

The Bahá'í Chair is also publishing two edited volumes, including the contributions of many speakers from recent lectures. *Structural Racism and the Root Causes of Prejudice* is edited with Associate Professor **Rashawn Ray** of the Department of Sociology, and will be published by the University of California Press. *Children and Globalization; Multidisciplinary Perspectives* is edited with Professor **Steven Mintz** of the University of Texas at Austin, and will be published with Routledge. ●

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