

2021

The Leonard and Shirley Goldstein Center for Human Rights - 2021 Year in Review

Leonard and Shirley Goldstein Center for Human Rights - University of Nebraska at Omaha

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The Leonard and Shirley Goldstein Center for Human Rights – 2021 Year in Review

The UNO Goldstein Center for Human Rights bears the burden, like other academic programs and human rights organizations, of not only exploring human rights in theory but of actually researching and making public human rights abuses. This leads us down some dark paths in our classrooms and publications. Human rights matter for real individuals and their families. In 2021, year two of Covid-19, pressing human rights issues have come close to home here in Omaha, Nebraska. The year began with a raging public health emergency and an attempted insurrection to overthrow the results of a democratic election in the United States. Like Covid-19, this crisis in American democracy has not yet abated. Human rights related work has come under great pressure from anti-democratic forces across the world. We are entirely aware that our present labors at the Goldstein Center are not carried out in an apolitical vacuum but instead under the umbrella of academic freedom secured by our forebears. Human rights and democracy go hand in hand.

Here at the Goldstein Center for Human Rights, we are a very diverse bunch with wide-ranging academic interests. This is evident in the make-up of our affiliated faculty that come from six Colleges at UNO. You can also see it in the course offerings of the Human Rights Studies Minor established in the College of Arts and Sciences. So many different academic disciplines provide expertise for studying human rights. Somewhat unusually for human rights centers across the USA, the Goldstein Center grew out of a Religious Studies program. On account of this, one of our unique specialties is the investigation of human rights and religion. Human rights studies intersect with not only the study of law and politics, but also the natural and health sciences – as is clearly evident in the face of present-day environmental and health catastrophes. An increasingly important area of focus, in conjunction with our partners in the College of Information Science and Technology, is digital human rights. The Goldstein Center, as will be discussed below, also supports human rights education through the arts. Before moving on, I want to give a big welcome to our newest affiliated faculty and support staff at the Goldstein Center for Human Rights.

Claire Du Laney (Criss Library)
Hannah June Kim (Political Science)
Janet Reilly (Political Science)
Amy Schindler (Criss Library)
Steven Torres (Foreign Languages and Literature)

Gary Saul (Office Associate)
Tristen Menichetti (Student Worker)

From the beginning of Covid-19 in 2020, the Goldstein Center rapidly expanded its online programming. Several of our in-person public events were moved to Zoom. Turning lemons into lemonade, this resulted in an increased audience from Nebraska but also across the country and the world. Focused on content generation related to human rights studies, we targeted the impact of the pandemic itself on human rights. Building on our seven-part series produced with UNO TV in 2020 titled "Human Rights in the Time of Covid-19," we have targeted issues related to the rights of workers to a safe workplace, the effects of Covid-19 on prison populations and childhood education, religious exemptions and vaccines, as well as local and global health disparities contributing to the ongoing crisis. In conjunction with the Religious Studies department and the Goldstein Family Community Chair in Human Rights, Dr. Laura Alexander, the annual Goldstein Lecture on Human Rights was given during the 2021 Human Rights Week by the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Dr. Nada Fadul on "The Right to Health, Equity, and the Pursuit of Justice." Throughout the year, we co-sponsored events related to Covid-19 and Human Rights with UNO Religious Studies, Medical Humanities, the Office of Latino and Latin American Studies (OLLAS), and Women and Gender Studies.

In partnership with the Goldstein Family Community Chair and with the help of our affiliated faculty, throughout 2021 the Goldstein Center produced online Human Rights Forums on a variety of pressing topics. These forums can be accessed on our Goldstein Center website with other newly developed academic content:

Human Rights and Anti-Racism: How is Anti-Racism Practiced in the Community (w/UNO Black Studies)
Human Rights and Religious Nationalism in the Middle East and United States (w/UNO Islamic Studies)
Covid-19 and Human Rights: Narratives of Latinos During the Pandemic (w/UNO OLLAS)
Human Rights, Vaccinations, and Religious Exemptions (w/UNO Medical Humanities)

One of the primary interests of affiliated faculty at the Goldstein Center is refugee and migrant studies. In addition to funding human rights research on this topic and co-sponsoring public events like Running for Refugees and Stories of Survival, in keeping with the work and legacy of Shirley Goldstein, we have aimed at making academic contributions that make a difference in people's lives. This was our goal in funding the development of a newly released app to settle refugees and migrants in Omaha by the College of Information Science and Technology and Walter Scott Jr. Scholar Kamryn Pullen. Understanding the grave consequences faced by scholars and journalists around the world who investigate and publicize human rights abuses, we have joined the Scholars At Risk Network. In Fall 2021, together with the UNO Fried Academy, we took the big plunge and partnered with the distinguished Institute for International Education to bring the Artist Protection Fund Fellow Sharmila Seyyid to UNO. This persecuted author was forced to flee her home country of Sri Lanka and live in exile in India and then Turkey because of threats against her life. With the help of people like Lori Arias in UNO International Programs and Associate Dean Melanie Bloom, Sharmila was reunited with her

children in Omaha where she continues her remarkable literary production. Many thanks to the English department as well as Women and Gender Studies for providing her with an academic home in the College of Arts and Sciences. I want to especially highlight the work of Goldstein Center Project and Design Manager Angela Brown in settling Sharmila and her family in Omaha. This has been a giant complicated undertaking and we could not have done this – like so many other things – without Angela’s labors. The Goldstein Center looks forward to working with Sharmila over the next two years and with the Institute for International Education into the distant future.

The Goldstein Center for Human Rights is faculty governed. Each year, affiliated faculty serving on three separate Standing Committees focused on Curriculum, Research, and Community Engagement review applications for funding and then forward them to the Executive Committee for approval. This governing team is composed of the following UNO faculty: Paul Williams (Assistant Director), Rory Conces (Curriculum Chair), Brett Kyle (Research Chair), Martina Saltamacchia (Community Engagement Chair), Alecia Anderson, Brady DeSanti, Troy Romero, Ramazan Kilingç, Laura Alexander, and Mark Celinscak. In 2021, the Goldstein Center acted to financially support the following major projects:

Refugees, Migration, and Human Rights (Laura Alexander)

Crisis and Culture of Fear Among Latino Communities in the Midwest (Cristian Dona-Reveco)

ArteLatinX2022: In it Together/Juntos en Esto (Adrian Duran)

Case Study and Action Research to Advance P-12 Teachers’ Understanding of Human Rights (Connie Schaffer)

The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Health Disparities in Nebraska: A Focus on Covid-19 Vaccine Uptake (Roma Subramanian)

There were a few changes to the Executive Committee in 2021. First, Ramazan Kilinc stepped in replacing Lana Obradovic who is on sabbatical. Ramazan, a Professor of Political Science and the head of the Islamic Studies Program at UNO, has worked with the Goldstein Center since its inception. In 2019, the Center chose to fund his online forum *Siyasa* that provides expert analyses on critical issues in the Middle East and the Muslim world especially related to human rights. In the past year, we have also co-sponsored UNO Islamic Studies lectures by Evelyn Alsultany on “How Media Representations of Muslims Changed After Trump’s ‘Muslim Ban’” and Nazif Shahrani on “Islam and Politics in Afghanistan Before and After the Taliban.” Expect much more on human rights, religion, and the Middle East in the near future.

In the second change to the Executive Committee, Martina Saltamacchia became the Chair of the Community Engagement Standing Committee returning to a position she held temporarily in the past. Martina is presently spearheading a 2022 Goldstein Center partnership with Kaneko to bring to Omaha CARNE y ARENA (Virtually present, Physically invisible) – Academy Award®-winning director Alejandro G. Iñárritu’s conceptual virtual reality installation on the human condition of immigrants and refugees

crossing the southern border of the United States. With Kaneko, we are planning a number of educational satellite talks and events for the UNO and the greater Omaha community.

In closing, I have two announcements. The first is a reminder to check out the latest volume of *ID: International Dialogue*, edited by Executive Committee member Rory Conces and supported by the Goldstein Center. Published at the end of each year, this multidisciplinary peer-reviewed academic e-journal aimed at scholars, policy makers, and practitioners can be accessed on the Goldstein Center website. We also have winners in the Goldstein Center's Human Rights Essay Contest that is organized by Laura Alexander. Congratulations to each!!

UNO Graduate Students

1. Mia Bourek
2. Sarah Brumfield
3. Laura Betz Burch

UNO Undergraduate Students

1. LeeAnna Lui
2. Travis Justin Munyer
3. Nyamar Odol

Omaha High School Students

1. Manali Mukherjee
2. Ben Schott

As we head into 2022, it is extremely comforting to have good colleagues and friends at your side. Many thanks to each of you who have helped us to make it through a long 2021. Wishing you and your loved ones health, justice, and peace in the New Year.

Curtis Hutt

Dr. Curtis Hutt

Associate Professor of Religious Studies

Executive Director, Leonard and Shirley Goldstein Center for Human Rights

University of Nebraska at Omaha