Peace, Conflict, and Coexistence Studies Program Learning Goals

From violence to non-violence: Since the end of World War II, Peace Studies has emerged as an interdisciplinary area of inquiry drawing on social science, the humanities, the creative arts, and science in efforts to understand reasons for war and ways of resolving conflicts without resorting to violence. Since the end of the Cold War, the primary focus of inquiry has shifted from US-Soviet relations and the nuclear threat to theories and practices of nonviolent conflict resolution in contexts all the way from nation-states to organizations to interpersonal violence, to violence and peace within the self. Along with the larger goal of ending war altogether, the Brandeis program reflects this tendency.

This is a time to examine the many meanings of “security.” The traditional concept of “national security” means nations each protecting their own “interests” and safety against those of others whose projects they find incompatible and/or competitive with their own. From Peace Studies, we learn the concept of “common security,” meaning that no one is truly safe until everyone is truly safe. It is through cooperation, empathy, and compassion, rather than military might and aggressive free market practices that common security will become possible.

Just as war is an invention that appeared in history about 13,000 years ago, so now is it time to invent peace, peace within nations, peace among nations, peace among peoples, and peace within ourselves.

Toward social justice: We in our field seek to investigate the nature of power, political participation, release from domination and exploitation, and the self’s relation to all this. We seek to develop ideas and nonviolent ways of addressing conflicts that honor the integrity and needs of all parties involved. It is time, in other words, to learn alternatives to violence and a time to learn the ways of ending war.

We distinguish in our field between “negative peace” and “positive peace.” The former simply means a condition of no armed hostilities. Many nations adjoining others exist in a cold peace (or negative peace) with each other. Positive peace means identifying the conditions of antagonism that can lead to war (e.g., differential access to resources, markets, honor, and the necessities of life) and creating ways to end those antagonisms so as to make war illogical and unthinkable.

We also distinguish in our field between “war culture” and “peace culture.” In a sort of anthropological way, all institutions and practices that celebrate and promote violence (e.g., much of the content of media, political and legal systems whose goals are winning rather than justice, fiercely competitive sports, super aggressive economic activities, and the like) constitute war culture. Those that promote and celebrate peace (e.g., cooperation, joint creative activity, empathic and compassionate relations to individuals and collectivities) represent peace culture.

One PAX requirement is a senior honors thesis or an internship. The latter, chosen by most program members, is meant to emphasize the experiential/praxis orientation of the program. Our internship students routinely report the importance of working on PAX issues in the field.
Core Skills: True to its interdisciplinarity, PAX encourages students to learn about war and peace from history, politics, sociology, anthropology, economics, the arts, the humanities, and the sciences. As students take courses in the various disciplines, they learn their methods of inquiry.

It is our expectation that PAX minors and independent PAX majors learn to:

- Ask significant questions about how each discipline offers insights and scholarship on issues of war and peace;
- Know theoretical approaches to the many disciplines related to our topic and the investigations that follow from them;
- Tease out hitherto unquestioned assumptions about war and peace, our economic system, human nature, masculinity, and more;
- Appreciate and understand subjective/emotional/social psychological as well as structural components of social processes and social movements;
- Conduct competent original research on war and peace related issues;
- Write a senior honors thesis on a peace-related topic or do an internship in a peace-related organization, to exemplify and promote the praxis part of PAX.

Knowledge: We expect that students completing the minor or independent interdisciplinary major in Peace, Conflict, and Coexistence Studies will learn and deepen their understanding of the following:

- how war arises in history and how it might end;
- a critical analysis of arguments for the inevitability of war and for possibilities of peace;
- varieties of ways conflicts have traditionally been solved;
- evolving forms of nonviolent conflict resolution and their many successes;
- similarities and differences between physical violence and “structural violence” including assaults on the environment;
- differences between national security and common security;
- the proliferation and complexities of components of war culture;
- the proliferation and complexities of components of peace culture;
• images and arguments for the possible imminence of paradigm shift, the great turning, the great transformation, and other suggestions that major change, necessary for human survival, may be under way;

• the relationship between inner peace and outer peace.

After graduation: Some PAX graduates go on to years and/or careers as social activists. Some do graduate work in nonviolent conflict resolution and wind up working in the field professionally. International students in PAX have commonly returned to their countries and engaged full- or part-time in conflict resolution and other kinds of activist work.