

**An Open Letter to the Council, Rector, Faculty, Staff, Students, & Alumni of
The United Nations Mandated University for Peace from the Peace Education MA**

December 1, 2014
University for Peace
Ciudad Colón, San Jose, Costa Rica

To the Council, Rector, Faculty, Staff, Students, & Alumni of the UN Mandated University for Peace:

We, the students of the Peace Education MA program, class of 2015, write to you to express our discontent and deep concerns with the proposed academic changes to the UPEACE curriculum.

While we agree that some academic changes are necessary, we denounce the radical overhauling of the UPEACE structure and the replacement of the Peace Education program with a specialization based on two courses. We are deeply troubled by the potential consequences of these proposed changes. The tragic loss of the programs in Peace Education, Gender and Peacebuilding, Media, Peace, and Conflict Studies, and International Peace Studies will undoubtedly impact the academic and professional credibility of UPEACE. The University for Peace is effectively the only institution in the world that offers a full MA in Peace Education. As UPEACE is the only institution mandated by the UN with “the great universal task of educating for peace” in its very Charter, doing away with this MA not only devalues the institution and the entire field of Peace Education, but also puts the advancement of peace at stake.

Peace Education is the cornerstone to building a culture of peace. It provides a holistic understanding of peace, which helps in cultivating knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that seek to transform people’s mindsets. Establishing a “specialization in Peace Education” within the Peace Studies Program that does not provide a comprehensive spectrum of critical, participatory, and transformative pedagogies for a culture of peace, and tools and skills for effective and creative design and teaching of peace-related curricula for formal and non-formal education will produce incompetent students with incomplete and inadequate skills to educate for peace. These changes will certainly have drastic negative effects on future students’ ability to continue in academia and their employability in public and private organizations.

The United Nations has been persistently calling on all nations to invest in Peace Education, as it promotes and strengthens a culture of peace worldwide, fulfilling its role as indicated in the UN General Assembly Declaration and Program of Action on a Culture of Peace. Furthermore, Peace Education plays an important role in peacebuilding and development work pursued by UN. Peace Education is a crucial component of the United Nations Secretary General’s Education First Initiative and multiple UN declarations and conventions specifically call for Peace Education and teacher training in Peace Education as essential to international peace and security efforts. It is also clear that Peace Education meets and plays an essential role in peacebuilding and the establishment of healthy and strong democracies. It builds a critical mass of people who will demand for and address the needed personal and structural changes that will transform many problems that relate to peace into nonviolent, humane, and ecological alternatives and solutions. Unfortunately, opportunities for gaining high-level knowledge and skills in Peace Education are few and far between. Eliminating the Peace Education MA would represent a tremendous setback to the achievements thus far accomplished and a roadblock to the full implementation of peacebuilding efforts pursued by the UN, other international organizations, governments, and civil societies all over the world.

As we move closer to the end of our first semester at UPEACE, we have reflected on the strong attributes of the Peace Education program. Our program has thus far been interdisciplinary, participatory, and diverse in its approach to peacebuilding. We recognize the importance of a cohesive interdisciplinary curriculum with the intention of contributing to a more peaceful world at all levels and dimensions of life. We have been challenged and encouraged to

critically engage with building peace through transformative education. Many of us chose this program due to the efforts of alumni and likewise we wish to speak well of UPEACE once we graduate. If our program is dissolved, we will not be able to in good conscience recommend UPEACE to prospective students.

In addition to our dismay at the elimination of the MA in Peace Education program, we are outraged at the process through which these changes have been proposed. As students of Peace Education, we recognize that the current process of academic reform goes against everything we have been studying in terms of curriculum development. We learn that Peace Education means a participatory process of curriculum development and taking the time to assess the needs of an academic community through dialogue and contributions from diverse community members - this is what academic reform at UPEACE should embody. Instead, there has been an astonishing lack of transparency, resistance to dialogue, and disrespectful treatment of students, alumni, and faculty. The resulting enforced culture of silence is antithetical to the values of UPEACE and the UN. We question the legitimacy of the Council to enforce these academic changes in the face of open condemnation by current students, alumni, staff, and faculty, and global leaders in Peace Education.

In solidarity with our peers in the Gender and Peacebuilding program, we request that any proposed reform of the academic program be put on hold until at least the 2016-2017 school year. As students of education, we recognize how much time and effort goes into developing relevant, holistic curricula. There is simply not enough time for such drastic changes to be implemented for the 2015-2016 academic year. Further, proposed changes should be discussed in open forums with the active and informed participation of the council, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and professional experts. This will allow UPEACE to utilize the incredible amount of knowledge, talent, and passion for peace at its disposal. Through such process, we are confident UPEACE will be adaptive and responsive to the needs of a changing world, rather than reactionary and narrow in its capacity. We have hope that the University for Peace can be a place where we put Peace Education into practice.

In the spirit of peace and cooperation,

The students of MA in Peace Education, Class of 2015, UN Mandated University for Peace:



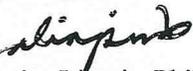
Emily Gorham, Canada



Marisa Huston, United States



Ji-hyoung Kang, South Korea



Abigail Praise Limpin, Philippines



Hazel Mora, Costa Rica

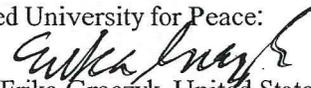


Elizabeth Pine, United States

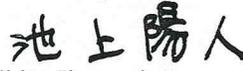


Hikari Taniguchi, Japan

Tatjana Topalovic, Switzerland



Erika Graczyk, United States



Akihito Ikegami, Japan



Desarae Koenneker, United States



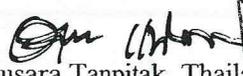
Rev Balangoda Ananda Manju, Sri Lanka



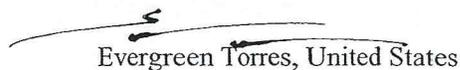
Miki Nakao, Japan



Mi Ri Seo, South Korea & Costa Rica



Anusara Tanpitak, Thailand



Evergreen Torres, United States