

Letter from the Director

Conflict transformation is about more than just resolving a dispute, but about addressing the deeper, underlying issues that cause conflict and perpetuate harm in the first place. This shift in perspective has been eye opening because it has made me more thoughtful in how I approach disagreements. Rather than seeing conflict as something that just needs to be “fixed”, I now recognize that conflict can be an opportunity for growth, understanding, and change.

- Student final reflection, Winter 2025



November 12 post-election community conversation at the Town Hall Theater, Middlebury. Photo Credit: Brett Simison

Conflict makes us uncomfortable. Across the CT Collaborative, we have been inviting people to reflect on how they respond to conflict ([learn more here](#)). Avoiders seek to bury or stay away from conflict, while problem-solvers want to fix things (confession: this is me). Yet a rush to problem solving can often miss the fact that the issue at hand may be a manifestation of long-standing dynamics in a relationship or organization. A rush to problem solving can also lead people to feel like their needs are being ignored. Thus, [our first learning goal](#) at the CT Collaborative is “a new understanding of conflict.” Working through conflict is how we grow.

We remain committed to this work even as the churning world encourages us to withdraw or give up. We have partners in Goma affected by fighting. Peacebuilding organizations are struggling in the face of stop-work orders. As educators, we can help our students build critical skills to offer effective and empathetic alternatives to the polarizing, stagnant models of “[conflict entrepreneurs](#)” in the public sphere.

One way to foster constructive conflict is to provide people meaningful spaces that invite complexity, connection, and curiosity. In 2024, we sought to support constructive conversations about politics during an election year. In the [Good Talks 2024](#) series, each event began with a short overview from an expert followed by guided small group conversations. Our ten events in the spring and fall tackled topics like trust in democracy, housing, reproductive policy, environment, foreign policy, health care, and immigration. Our student interns co-designed the questions and co-facilitated each event. After the election, 70 people joined a community reflection event at Middlebury’s Town Hall theater. We ended the series with a post-inauguration event in Wilson Hall in January with political science professor [Bert Johnson](#) and restorative justice leader [sujatha baliga](#). Read more about the Good Talks events in *Seven Days* ([link](#)), the *Rutland Herald* ([link](#)), and the *Addison Independent* ([link](#)).

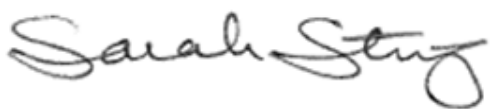
Good Talks 2024: A series of events designed to foster constructive conflict and dialogue.

Come join us or reach out to talk about ways to bring this work into your communities and organizations. In the stories below, you'll hear about the work we have been doing across the global Middlebury. A few flagship events for your calendars:

- *In California:* on Friday, May 2, we will host the day long Conflict Transformation graduate seminar at MIIS - more details to come!
- *In Vermont:* April 7-10, we will host 2024 honoree degree recipients Emily Welty and Matthew Breay Bolton. Scholars, artists, and activists, they are part of the 2017 Nobel Prize-winning International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. They will give a public talk at 7 pm ET on April 7, and we are working with the Rohatyn Center for Global Affairs and Franklin Environmental Center to create many opportunities for engagement!

We continue to expand training opportunities for students, faculty, and staff. Read about the full scope of our work in our [2024 Annual Report](#), and then please follow our Events page or Instagram feed for coming events and opportunities. As always, reach out at any time at conflicttransformation@middlebury.edu.

With gratitude and hope,



Breadloaf Teachers Network NextGen November Convening

Louisville, a founding site of BLTN NextGen, invited guests from across the network to learn about their city and schools and share insights into making

schools and communities more just and equitable. Youth from three Louisville high schools welcomed peers from South Carolina, the Navajo Nation, and New Mexico for the three-day event in November. To get to know the city and its roots, students visited the Muhammad Ali Center, the Louisville Zoo, the Speed Art Museum, and the Louisville Slugger Museum and Factory. We were welcomed to Fern Creek High School by Brent Peters (MA '16) who recounted [the "Navajo-Kentuckians" collaborations](#), and who encouraged everyone present to pursue their questions with passion. Heather Jones, Site Mentor for NextGen - Louisville, offered this reflection "After having the good fortune of visiting other NextGen sites and learning of their cultures, it was an honor to host a gathering in Louisville to share with those who have been so welcoming to us. It is always amazing to watch students from different regions and backgrounds find that they have so much in common! Their commitment to create positive change bridges states, cultures, and generations."



BLTN NextGen students in Louisville. Photo credit: Tom McKenna

Dialogue and Restorative Practices in

Dialogue and Restorative Practices in Professional Development

This exceeded all my expectations. I don't know what I thought it would be like, maybe more generic training, but it was not. It challenged, encouraged, and supported me and, just as importantly, taught me immensely. The most important part, in addition to providing a community of like-minded people and educators, was the blending of community and content-building methodologies it explored. I came out of every session learning something new, and took those approaches into the classroom and my everyday life.

- Final reflection, Engaged Listening Project cohort member, Fall 2024

This summer, we revised and expanded our main professional development program, the [Engaged Listening Project](#) (ELP). ELP now focuses on both structured dialogue and restorative practices. We are very grateful for our long partnership with [Essential Partners](#), who led our training workshops for four years. We now have the internal capacity to lead this work ourselves, and we have expanded the curriculum to a full range of CT skills, still grounded in dialogue but now incorporating restorative practices and an increased focus on critical self-awareness, communication, and community building. The Fall 2024 ELP cohort consisted of 18 faculty and staff, representing thirteen departments and programs and four college offices, from Chinese Language and Literature, to Black Studies, to the Language Schools, and our Spring 2025 cohorts have already begun their training.

You can learn more about the evolution of the ELP in a [Constructive Dialogue Institute webinar](#) from November. This panel on “rebuilding resilient campus communities” had 450 attendees and has generated new partnerships in higher education.





Members of Dima Ayoub and Brian Lind's cohort. Photo credit: Brian Lind

Rebuilding Resilient Campus Communities: Strategies for Healing and Preparing for Future Challenges

For: Higher Ed

Webinars

Actionable strategies to rebuild community at your institution after a disruption



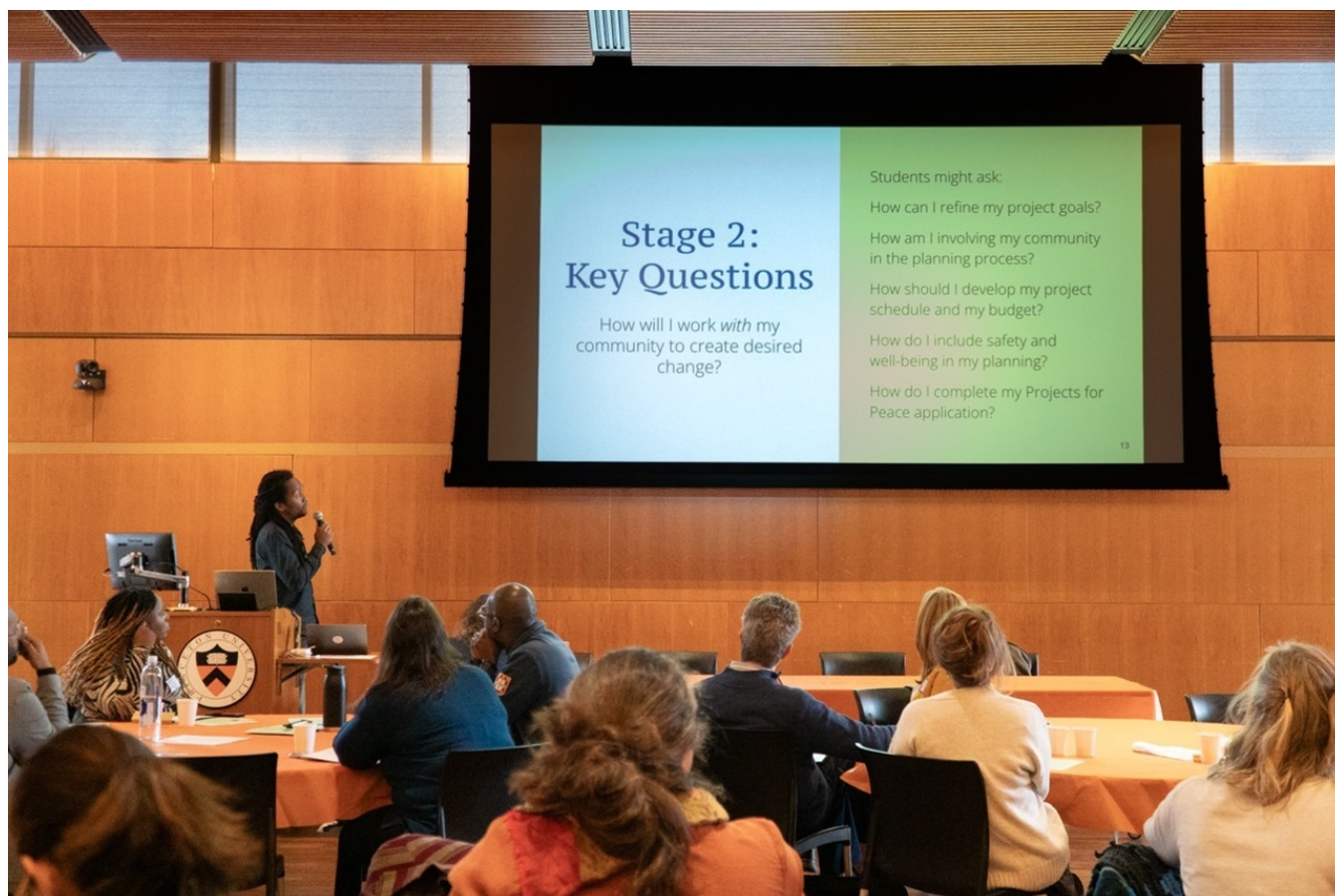
Promoting Peacebuilding in Higher Education

Our partners in [Projects for Peace](#) hosted an inaugural convening at Princeton University in November. Twenty-eight different institutions were represented at a gathering focused on "Student-Community-Campus."

Participants focused on youth peacebuilding and conflict transformation

Participants focused on youth peacebuilding and conflict transformation, offering opportunities to share programmatic ideas to inspire Projects for Peace programs on each campus. Five plenary sessions and eight break-out sessions were facilitated by liaisons and PfP staff, and participants had a chance to build what one attendee described as “an incredible network of campus liaisons thinking about the values of peace and justice.” The next convening is scheduled for June 2025 at the Middlebury Institute for International Studies in Monterey, California.

As one participant shared, “I... loved how we stepped back to examine and reflect on the context of this program--the 'why' and the 'what for.' I didn't expect to have such philosophical conversations and it was a welcome surprise! I appreciated what I learned from my fellow liaisons and left feeling very inspired about my role with this amazing program!”



Projects for Peace Program Coordinator Antonio Baker-Medard presents on the Project Cycle. Photo Credit: Caroline McArdle

Community Partner Convenings

Deepening community-based partnerships is a central component of conflict transformation-oriented work across Middlebury. As part of these efforts, colleagues and students regularly meet with community partners to reflect on and explore student engagement and broader impacts of their project-based experiential learning, courses, internships, and Practica. In October 2024, [CoLab](#) CT Graduate Assistant Fellow and CT Cohort Fellow (and Middlebury College alumnus) Angela Izi Nkusi co-organized and co-facilitated the CoLab community partner convening hosted at MIIS. Participants included faculty and staff Netta Avineri, Gabriel Guillen, Carolyn Meyer, Phil Murphy, and Scott Pulizzi as well as community partners Big Sur Land Trust and Gathering for Women. The session was a meaningful opportunity to strengthen these relationships through mutual learning, productive exploration of tensions, and creative ideas for future engagement in Monterey County.





Carolyn Meyer (MIIS) and Angela Izi Nkuzi (College '24, MIIS '26) meet with community partners in October. Photo credit: Stian Lothe

Embracing Constructive Conflict in Study Abroad

As we reported in our September newsletter, educators from across Middlebury led the [opening plenary panel](#) at The [Forum on Education Abroad](#)'s Europe, Middle East and Africa Conference. The plenary highlighted the productive possibilities of conflict in intercultural education and explored how students can transform their understanding of themselves and deepen interpersonal, intercultural relationships through constructive conflict.

Opportunities to build conflict transformation skills are expanding in many of our Schools. At the School in Taiwan, Charlie Fisch '26 volunteered to lead an orientation session on CT. In November, a day-long retreat focused on cross-cultural conflicts between Chinese and Western cultural norms. The final reflections from the retreat were shared with the academic community and local partners.





At a student-organized session on CT in the School in Taiwan, students engaged with the instructor to center themselves and prepare for deeper self-awareness, which will later support their reflections on conflict situations.

2025 Faculty Research Grant Recipients

We have a new class of CT-supported faculty researchers in 2025! This fall, we received 29 applications from a diverse array of disciplines. For each application, our selection committee considered the substantive relationship of the project to conflict transformation, contribution to knowledge, the project's feasibility, and impact potential. Many thanks to our committee members: Allison Berke (MIIS), Michole Biancosino (College), Suzanne Gurland (College), and David Wick (MIIS).

The eleven projects in our 2025 faculty research cycle are:

- Erica Barbarossa (CTEC), “The Intersection Between Accelerationism, Ecofascism, and Climate-Driven Conflict”
- Marcia Collaer (Psychology), “Origins of Conflict-Related Personality Traits”
- Natalie Chwalisz and Sebnem Gumuscu (Political Science), “Populism Beyond Borders”
- Ellery Foutch (American Studies), “From Weapons of War to Emblems of Peace”

- Jamie McCallum (Sociology), “A Better Bargain: Transforming Conflict Negotiation Processes Between Workers and Management”
- Hanna Notte (CNS), “We Shall Outlast them: How Russia’s Conflict With the West Went Global”
- Katharine Petrich (NPTS), “From Conflict Predation to Stable Conservation”
- William Potter, Siegfried Hecker, and Yanliang Pan (CNS), “Conflict Transformation in Sino-US Nuclear Relations”
- William Pyle (Economics), “Russian Society, Patriotic Attachment, and the Legacy of the Early 1990s”
- Moyara Ruehsen (Financial Crime Management) and Jay Shapiro (IGS), “Using Conflict Transformation to Break Down Barriers to Cross-Border Financial Crime Investigations”
- John Schmitt (Mathematics and Statistics), “Optimal Scheduling Under Conflict”

A Note of Gratitude: President Emeritus Laurie Patton

In 2022, Laurie Patton announced the largest-ever programmatic grant in Middlebury’s history to support the study and practice of conflict transformation. This initiative would not have been possible without Laurie’s vision. She saw how Middlebury’s long commitment to intercultural communication, a liberal arts commitment to seeing the world through multiple perspectives, and its nascent work in restorative practices and structured dialogue could be scaled up to prepare our students for a world in which destructive conflicts and threats to democracy need meaningful responses. You can hear our now President Emeritus speak about the evolution of this work on the [Interfaith America podcast](#) with Eboo

Patel. At Laurie's final Board of Trustees meeting in October, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and restorative practices leader Brian Lind surprised Laurie with a student leadership award in conflict transformation named in her honor.



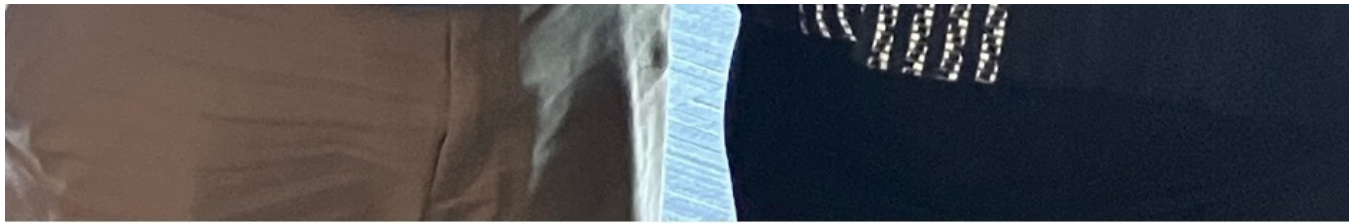


Photo Credit: Shannon Bohler

That's all... for now!

For more updates, check out our [website](#) and Instagram:

[@middconflicttransformation](#)



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Conflict Transformation Collaborative

The CT Collaborative at Middlebury works to embed the practice of conflict transformation in the full continuum of a... more

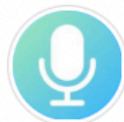
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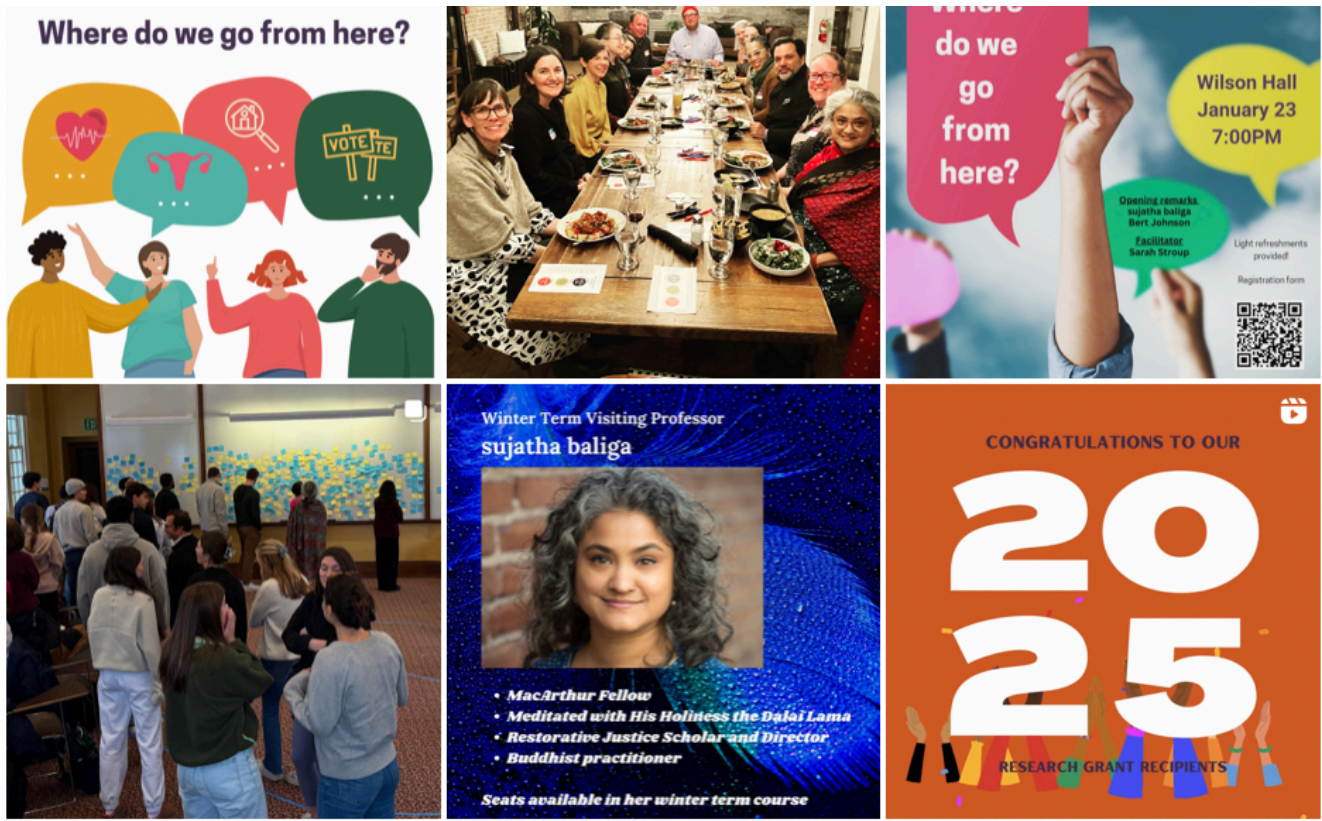
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