



# May 2026 Newsletter



## Letter from the Executive Director

Dear partners,

Past, present, and future are intertwined in the pursuit of transformation. As we transition from the academic year to the summer months, I am reflecting upon collective time well spent - through deepened knowledge, sustained relationships, and meaningful action within communities. John Paul Lederach's 2026 book is beautifully titled, *The Centuries Wrap Round Us*. The passage of time reminds us that continuity and change are connected, and challenges us to identify our shared purpose in the face of conflict at every scale. In this way, conflict and change are always in *processes of becoming* over time.

Since I began as Executive Director in July 2025, I have been inspired by the incredible conflict and change-related work that colleagues, students, and community partners have engaged in deeply across a range of contexts. Through the stories shared in this newsletter, we highlight how faculty/staff impact others through community engagement, training, and pedagogy - and also the impact that these meaningful interactions have on them during their professional careers. Sustained relationships over time are core to the ongoing work of the CT Collaborative. "CT" has become embodied as an educator, teaching us all to interact with humility, vulnerability, and openness. And in the fifth year of the CT Collaborative, these principles guide us in our mutually informing work of both internal and external engagement - looking inward and outward simultaneously.

We are deepening engagement internally, across departments/programs/majors, with [events](#) including the College's Community Conversation about building relationships to balance home and the world, the graduate pillar's CT Annual Seminar featuring over 30 students' yearlong projects and 4 skills-based workshops, the 3rd event in our Social Change series (focused on peacebuilding and public history), continued CT-related professional development for faculty/staff, and selection of Charlie Fisch as the 2026 recipient of the Laurie L. Patton Leadership Award in Conflict Transformation. Students across undergraduate majors are completing the [CT Academic Cluster](#) (see our Instagram page for more information about these stellar students). These interdisciplinary opportunities provide new, richer perspectives on the potential for CT to broaden our understandings of one another and the world around us.

We are also focused on external partnership-building (through national/internal consortia, local and regional community partners, and convenings) as well as through dissemination (like our Instagram page) and [resources](#) (like our CT learning goals and new [CT glossary](#)). There are myriad connections between CT and the social issues shaping the experiences of individuals and communities across the globe. For example, when I presented at/participated in the March 2026 [Campus Compact](#) conference, I learned about and contributed to discussions focused on the roles of critical dialogue, deliberation, and civic fluency in higher education. These external conversations meaningfully shape our ongoing work in the Collaborative in a host of ways.

Looking to summer, [our CT leadership group and External Advisory Board](#) will meet in June for our annual retreat (to be held for the first time at the Middlebury in DC office), giving us a unique opportunity to take stock and chart what the coming months and years of the Collaborative's work may look like. To offer a few examples of 2026 summer planning/programming - Bread Loaf School of English "Change" faculty will be offering their impactful courses to K-12 teachers from across the country. Middlebury College faculty and staff will prepare for another semester of meaningful engagement in the Engaged Listening Project in fall 2026. Over 65 undergraduate students will participate in experiential learning programs within diverse communities, cultures, and contexts. The new cohorts of graduate Conflict Transformation Cohort and Mentor Fellows will be selected. And faculty/staff across the Schools Abroad will work on curriculum and community-engaged projects across multilingual and intercultural contexts. In addition, colleagues are actively planning for summer convenings in the US and in Europe, for educators and administrators working in experiential learning, project administration, and international education spheres. All of these efforts demonstrate our ongoing commitment to collaborative learning spaces, ongoing reflection, iteration, and collective impact.

Finally, the summer edition of our newsletter will come out in late June. We look forward to engaging and learning with all of you in the coming months. After all, time is of the essence.

Sincerely,



Dr. Netta Avineri

Executive Director, Kathryn Wasserman Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation

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## Faculty/Staff Impact

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### Pillar One: High School Education

#### Student Filmmakers Make Local History Documentary

[What's the Story? The Young Filmmakers' Social Action Team](#) is a yearlong program, part of the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, that empowers young people to investigate issues they care about and create original documentary films through research, collaboration, and storytelling. Teachers from anywhere in the world can join the WTS cohort annually at no cost to support this work with their students.

The following piece, written by Bobby Harley and featured in the [WTS Substack newsletter](#), highlights how this documentary work comes to life in Gastonia, North Carolina—centering local history and lived experiences as students connect past and present through film.



The Gaston County team is currently developing a documentary on the 1974 Ashbrook High School championship team, using the story to explore its broader historical and social context. To build that foundation, students have been studying landmark events like *Brown v. Board of Education* and examining school integration in Little Rock, Arkansas—work that has helped them better understand the local significance of integration in their own community.

Students have also begun conducting interviews with individuals connected to the story. One former athlete, Milton Edwards (number 82), shared firsthand insights and even contributed drone footage that will strengthen the film’s visual storytelling. Additional interviews are planned after spring break, including conversations with other former athletes, the curator of the Gaston County Museums, and potentially the two sisters who helped integrate Ashley High School (later Ashbrook), bringing powerful personal perspectives into the project. Engagement has been high, with students showing genuine curiosity about their community’s connection to the civil rights movement and asking deeper questions about how history is experienced and remembered. The work is helping students see history not as something distant, but as lived experience within their own community. Now in its second year, the Gaston County team has adapted its approach in response to local challenges, shifting to an “all hands on deck” model that brings students from across history classes into the work. This structure has expanded participation and deepened students’ sense of shared ownership as they shape the documentary together.

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## Pillar Two: Undergraduate Campus Life

### Fellows Share How ELP Impacts Student-Facing Work



The Spring 2026 [Engaged Listening Project](#) (ELP) currently supports 22 Fellows divided into two collaborative cohorts. These Fellows represent the full breadth of the Middlebury experience, from Biology and Music to Health Services and Civil Rights & Title IX. While their roles vary, they share a common goal: deepening their engagement with students, expanding their toolkit, and navigating conflict and change. Because of this disciplinary diversity, the impact of the program is multifaceted, influencing

professors in classroom pedagogy to staff supporting student leadership and mentorship. Below, four current Fellows share how the ELP is impacting their work:

“My experience in the Engaged Listening Project as both a participant and facilitator has profoundly influenced how I engage with students in and out of class. Not only have I become more attuned to the diversity of life stories and inner lives of all community members, ELP has clarified my priorities as a teacher on a residential liberal arts campus: human connection. It is both the basis and the goal for the entire enterprise of education, in my view. Having a structure and a set of skills and sensibilities that remind me to take stock of what matters and being deliberate in everything from course planning to advising sessions has been really helpful. Additionally, I’ve gotten to meet people across our campus community who I never would have met otherwise. So, win, win.” ~ *Amit Prakash, Professor of Global Studies*

“Learning new tools and building community with fellow faculty and staff during ELP to better engage with students in different ways has been such a reciprocal experience. I feel deeply honored to be part of this cohort model and I am deeply grateful to push the limits of how I’ve engaged with students and know there are immense possibilities to continue engaging.” ~ *Janae Due, Director for the Prism Center for Queer and Trans Life*

“The ELP has been a breath of fresh air among the hectic pace of life and work at Middlebury. It’s provided me with a fresh perspective, and a toolkit for engaging with students, faculty/staff, and visitors at the MAC. Even as someone with decades of experience at Middlebury, I met a whole new group of colleagues from all across campus—and we’re developing a shared framework for how we connect with each other, whether in times of agreement or in times of conflict. I’d recommend the program to any student-facing staff member who wants to deepen their ability to work collaboratively and authentically.” ~ *Liza Sacheli, Director, Mahaney Arts Center*

“Participating in ELP has strengthened my capacity to listen and communicate across difference, skills that sit at the heart of both ethnomusicology and pedagogy. It has given me practical frameworks for navigating the complex dynamics that arise when students from diverse backgrounds engage with unfamiliar musical traditions.” ~ *Damascus Kafumbe, Professor of International Studies & Professor of Music*

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### **Pillar Three: Undergraduate Experiential Learning**

#### **Working with the Shepherd Consortium on Poverty**



Teams of students reflect on the knowledge, skills, and commitments they developed through their alternative break experiences.

Pillar Three collaborates with the [Shepherd Higher Education Consortium on Poverty](#) to reach a network of 17 schools and “prepare students for a lifetime of professional and civic efforts to diminish poverty and enhance human capability.” SHECP Executive Director, Jen Handy, reflects:

‘This type of work, whether done professionally or civically, is full of conflicts, trade-offs, competing needs, and tensions. If we are in this for the long haul, we need conflict skills to help us do this work sustainably, effectively, and collaboratively. And these are skills a lot of us don’t have.

Since 1998, SHECP has coordinated a [summer internship program](#) that matches students with organizations engaged in hands-on, community-facing, anti-poverty work and provides cohort-based living with students from across the Consortium. Since 2023, [a Conflict Transformation curriculum](#) has been a core component of the SHECP internship. Originally, we saw the immediate need to help students navigate the conflicts and confusion within their cohorts or workspace. Quickly, we realized the value of this curriculum extended well beyond the individual spaces. Of course there was conflict stemming from the different communication styles of fellow interns, but there was also conflict stemming from budget needs from different programs at their internship site

and from policy decisions at the community-level. Seeing the potential for the curriculum pushed us from teaching conflict as “not as scary as you think” to really encouraging students to explore conflict as a “motor of change.”

In the summer of 2025, 57 SHECP Summer Interns completed the full Conflict Transformation curriculum. While all of the students are coming to SHECP with an academic grounding in poverty studies, we see their SHECP summer as a tremendous opportunity to complement, deepen, and often challenge that knowledge outside of a traditional classroom setting.’

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## Pillar Four: Graduate Training and Research

### **Poetry as a Medium of Conflict Transformation: In the Classroom & in the Community**

*By Marie Butcher (AKA Marie Boucher), Poet Laureate of Monterey County*

April is National Poetry Month and this year, [Assistant Professor Marie Butcher \(AKA Marie Boucher\)](#) is marking the **7th Annual Poetry Week** with her new, exciting title as [Poet Laureate of Monterey County](#).

Marie Butcher and Rana Issa (former MIIS Arabic assistant professor) started MIIS Poetry Week in 2020, and it has since grown to become a vibrant poetry community ([the International Poetry Gathering of Monterey](#)), They meet the last Sunday of the month from 3-5pm at the East Village Café in downtown Monterey. Further, they developed an annual April Poetry Week to celebrate National Poetry Month, with diverse, interdisciplinary and multilingual events both on- and off-campus. Engaging participants in poetry as a source and method of conflict transformation, peace, and community-building is at the heart of IPG, an inclusive space for students and community members to share poems in any language. This year’s events will be celebrated from April 18-26, with multilingual offerings, such as “Lyrical Lines from Lands of the Mystics” among other events weaving together music, poetry, and the arts.

The ultimate theme of cultivating peace and community is the cornerstone of the multilingual poetry anthology, *Doves Born of Flames*, (a CT-supported project, edited by Butcher), slated for publication later this year. Inspired by the message by Alhanislam (Maryam Bukar Hassan, the first [UN](#) Global Advocate for Peace and Security) that “[Peace is a Verb](#),” Butcher affirms that peacebuilding “requires our deep reflections, listening, and actions, based on supporting our relationship to the natural world and each other.”



See [jggmonterey.org](http://jggmonterey.org) for the full schedule of Poetry Week 2026 and past events.

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## Pillar Five: Global Engagement

### **Global Students Learn about Intercultural Medicine in Patagonia**

Liria Evangelista is the Director, Spanish School in Buenos Aires and Professor, Writing for Linguistic and Cultural Competence for the Middlebury Schools in Argentina and Uruguay. She shared about the impact that Conflict Transformation has had on her

both professionally and personally:

“I have been teaching and designing the Writing and Culture class for almost twenty years, facing the challenge of addressing different aspects of Argentine and Uruguayan culture, politics and history in ways the students would find meaningful and stimulating, thus enabling a better understanding of their semester abroad. Writing was always a central part of the class's different activities. However, it wasn't until the appearance of the Conflict Transformation initiative that the class – and my teaching – changed dramatically. Although writing remains as a fundamental activity, having Conflict Transformation at its core, the course and my work developed a clear structure and purpose, illuminating areas that until then remained unclear or unseen. The most challenging aspect is working with the students towards the formulation of complex questions which address the ways in which conflict is inscribed within material conditions which are particular to the actors involved, their history and their identities. The most surprising – and meaningful – part of this project is realizing how it affected and changed my own position as a teacher, as an Argentine citizen and as a South American.”



*CT Writing and Culture Course Excursion to Neuquén in the Argentine Patagonia. Intercultural Hospital Raguñ Kien (Aluminé). Students listening to a mapuche nurse explaining how indigenous medicines are produced.*

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## **Pillar Six: Research Grants**

Each year, the CT Collaborative awards a range of research grants across Middlebury College and MIIS, with the aim of furthering our understanding about conflict and change at multiple scales. As of 2026, we are celebrating having supported more than 50 grants that span a host of foci and methodologies. These projects are generating new implications for conflict transformation in the sciences, humanities, social sciences, professional fields, and beyond, led by expert faculty and research staff. Many projects incorporate student contributions to research, innovations in related course design, and/or interdisciplinary bridge-building.

Future editions of this newsletter will feature spotlights on CT research projects. We are excited to share insights from principal investigators; the experiences of student RAs; collaborations with external partners; and more. Meanwhile, readers can also explore the breadth and depth of our grantees' work on the [CT Research website](#).

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## EVENTS and OPPORTUNITIES

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### *At the Middlebury College campus:*

**April 7th Community Conversations.** Engaged Listening Project leaders led a dialogue with faculty and staff at Wilson Hall. Participants came from a wide range of departments, deepening the breadth of discussion.

**April 27 Social Change Speaker Series** Sheldon Museum Director Coco Moseley, Professor Ellery Foutch and Curriculum Specialist Devin Winter shared details on the Charity & Sylvia collection curriculum program which highlights how historical inquiry and object study can open space for reflection, dialogue, and a deeper understanding of the past.

### *At the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey campus:*

**April 22 Poetry Week - Earth Day.** Professor Marie Butcher continues to lead this annual event in the MIIS garden when students, faculty, and staff celebrate Earth Day with poetry, music, and inspiration during Poetry Week.

**May 1 Graduate Fellow Seminar: Navigating Conflict and Change: Sharing Models and Building Skills.** CT Fellows conducted an interactive exploration of conflict transformation at local, domestic, and global scales - highlighting community-based advocacy, approaches to environmental conflict, methods for countering extremism, engaging across cultures, sustainable peacebuilding, ethical storytelling, and more.

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## EXTERNAL OPPORTUNITY

The Institute for Citizens and Scholars is recruiting the next class of [Carnegie Young Leaders](#), a yearlong fellowship supporting teams of young people (ages 14–24) as they design solutions for real challenges in their communities. Each team receives up to \$7,500 in funding, along with coaching, a national peer network, and opportunities for in-person learning and collaboration. The goal is to have teams from all 50 states, a toolkit with ready-to-use material is [here](#).

The deadline to apply is May 4 (Vermont applicants are offered an extended deadline, but must contact the Institute to do so.)

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**That's all... for now!**

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