



April 2026 Newsletter

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear partners,

The ongoing work of transforming conflict occurs through small scale interactions, the creation of institutional priorities, big picture policy change, and more. Meaningful learning happens when humility and expertise are in balance among the group. Through the many programs and initiatives within the CT Collaborative, we seek to foster learning environments where students, staff, faculty, community members, and partners all contribute to collective knowledge and action. In this newsletter, we are highlighting student impact - the impact that students can have on the conflicts and changes important to them as well as the impact that these experiences and relationships have on the students themselves. We will focus on a range of programs - K-12 educator communities of practice where teachers become learners, undergraduate faculty/staff professional development where new CT practices are piloted and reflected upon, undergraduate students make meaning from short term experiences in communities around the globe, graduate students apply policy and development frameworks to a nation's philosophies and practices, and history is made relevant in the present through impactful site visits in a specific cultural context. Across all of these examples, we can see the role of conflict transformation as the *what, how, and why* of deep, mutual student learning and impact - and the centrality of relationships in building these significant learning experiences.

This coming month, we have several events that foreground relationships for impact. Scroll down for more information and ways to get involved.

We look forward to engaging with you soon!

All my best,

Dr. Netta Avineri
Middlebury Conflict Transformation Collaborative Executive Director

Student Impact

Pillar One: High School Education

Winter Institute 2026: Teachers as Students



The Bread Loaf School of English (BLSE) consistently brings together public, private, and independent K-12 teachers for innovative teaching/learning experiences. During the Winter Institute, held this year February 28 - March 1, participants engaged in dynamic workshops and special sessions exploring literary texts, periods, and genres alongside the theoretical, pedagogical, historical, and community frameworks that push learning beyond the classroom. This year's theme "Expanding the English Classroom" allowed these teachers to become students within meaningful communities of practice - demonstrating the importance of creativity, vulnerability, partnership, and courage. They were eager to bring back all they learned to their work across institutional and regional contexts. In their final reflection, they identified threads across their learning and action steps to move their practice forward. We share below several quotes from the students, highlighting how their work as students creates layers of meaning for the students with whom they work:

"The workshops were phenomenal, which goes without saying. But the time to talk to other educators from across the US, from various schools and backgrounds was really fantastic. Just to be able to swap ideas, tools, and stories with people with a variety of experiences was so beneficial!"

"By the end of the weekend, participants weren't just inspired—they left with action plans for school and community projects shaped by what they learned, and designed to positively impact thousands of students." "Connecting with ideas about delivery of content and connecting students to content in non-traditional ways will translate to new opportunities for my students that I might otherwise not have considered."

For more information about the Winter Institute, [click here](#).

Pillar Two: Undergraduate Campus Life

Classroom Impact for Engaged Listening Fellows

The [Engaged Listening Project](#) (ELP) is a semester-long professional development opportunity for faculty and staff at Middlebury College. Throughout their time in the program, participants collaborate using a range of activities in the robust ELP Toolkit. In March 2026, the 24 Engaged Listening Fellows gathered in their respective cohorts to share an activity from the ELP Toolkit they had recently piloted with their students. Whether it was a new approach to an existing practice or an entirely new intervention, each Fellow worked backwards to reflect on their goals: *Why did they choose a specific ELP skill or disposition, and how did it impact their students?*

- The range of applications was vast, and each was rooted in a relational focus:
- Some Fellows led structured dialogues or restorative practice circles with classes or student groups.
- Intentional Starts: Others led arrival activities specifically designed to foster community building and to connect before class or a meeting began.
- A few utilized quiet pauses and deep breaths to slow down during difficult conversations.
- Several Fellows focused on one-on-one meetings, using questions of curiosity. This frame can shift the Fellow from the role of expert or problem solver, facilitating a process by which the student navigates their own path to a conclusion.
- Many Fellows reimagined their physical environments, shifting furniture and seating arrangements to encourage students to work with and engage with new peers.

These small, consistent actions can accumulate in meaningful ways towards institutional and culture change, through a slow, practiced evolution - creating a profound and lasting impact on the campus community.

Pillar Three: Undergraduate Experiential Learning

Middlebury Alternative Break (MAIt) Reflection Evening Feb '26



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

The [Middlebury Alternative Break \(MAIt\)](#) Program held its annual reflective evening on February 19. Facilitated by MAIt co-presidents and seniors, Lily Oudommahavanh and Changchang Ma, the evening promised MAIt trip participants time to reminisce, eat together, and make meaning from their recent February break MAIt experiences.

Overall, 47 students participated in Middlebury Alternative Break (MAIt) 2026. Leading up to the culminating reflection evening, trip leaders planned and prepared for their trips during the Fall term and traveled with their teams during Feb break. Destinations and collaborations included: the Dominican Republic to work with the Mariposa Foundation for youth empowerment; St. Petersburg, Florida with community partners, St. Bernard Project/SBP, to work on disaster relief projects; to New York City on an economic-justice themed trip; and to Los Angeles with a focus on environmental justice.

This year students presented slide shows, sharing highlights of and insights from their experiences, the organizations they volunteered with, and glimpses of the places and communities they discovered. The evening concluded with small-group discussions reflecting on civic and conflict transformation skills, knowledge, and personal growth gained from their community-engaged experiences.

Pillar Four: Graduate Training and Research

CT as a Practice of Balance:

Making Sense of Gross National Happiness and UN Sustainable Development Goals in Bhutan

In January 2026, students from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS) traveled to Bhutan for a 11-day immersive course examining how the nation integrates Gross National Happiness (GNH) with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The program was hosted by Royal Thimphu College and included diverse meetings and site visits exploring the country's development model. For example, meetings with the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy and the GNH Commission allowed students to study how GNH indicators meaningfully shape policy in areas including education, healthcare, cultural preservation, and environmental protection.



Students maintained reflective journals exploring CT themes while engaged in conversations with government leaders, monastic educators, legal scholars, and nonprofit and youth advocates. Reflecting on the experience, participant Sylvie Alexander noted, *"This experience helped me understand development not just as progress, but as a practice of balance, especially as Bhutan grapples with rising youth migration and shifting aspirations."* A co-faculty for the course, Dr. Carolyn Meyer shared, *"Our CT themes centered on the many tensions arising in Bhutan today, from its centuries-old concern over being swallowed up by its larger neighbors to its quest to integrate GNH values in all of its policies to promote sustainable development."*

One month after returning to campus, students presented research on the practical and policy implications of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) framework and its development goals, covering topics such as good governance, religious ecotourism, and the challenges of youth emigration. Additionally, presenters explored GNH through feminist theory, proposed a Thai student mobility marketing plan, and highlighted the sustainability paradox of the new Gelephu Mindfulness City in the southern plains of Bhutan.

By Carolyn Taylor Meyer, PhD, Director of Experiential Learning, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

Pillar Five: Global Engagement

Global Students Learn about Intercultural Medicine in Patagonia

As part of their Writing & Culture class since 2024, students from the Middlebury Schools in Argentina and Uruguay travel together to Neuquén, Argentina at the northern end of Patagonia. Through preparatory coursework and site visits in Neuquén, students examine the historical tensions between indigenous Mapuche communities and the Argentine state, focusing on case studies that highlight both ongoing struggles and transformative initiatives.



Last fall, at the [Raguiñ Kien intercultural hospital](#), students examined an innovative collaboration between Mapuche and Western medicine. And at a local teacher-training center, students heard from guest speakers on how transformational approaches to pedagogy can allow for institutional change. Each visit emphasized sustained relationship-building and trust with local communities as essential to meaningful intercultural dialogue and long-term collaboration.

“Reflecting on everything we experienced, I understood that transforming a conflict doesn't mean eliminating it. It means learning to inhabit it. The conflicts I witnessed—between science and spirituality, between the state and the community, between the body and the land—are not merely power struggles but struggles for meaning. The actors were many: doctors, shamans, academics, farmers, young people. All trying to find a way to speak without their voices drowning out each other's. And the possible transformation lies there: in the humility to listen. In accepting that there are many small truths instead of one grand one. In understanding that health, justice, and the land cannot be separated. I learned that sometimes conflict doesn't need to be resolved; it needs to be transformed into conversation, into reciprocity, into mutual respect. Perhaps healing - both of our bodies and of the planet - begins there.” (Middlebury School in Argentina student)

UPCOMING EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES



At Middlebury College:

April 3 is the nomination deadline for the [Laurie L Patton Leadership in Conflict Transformation Award](#). Inspired by the work of Laurie Patton, 17th President of Middlebury College, this award recognizes an outstanding undergraduate student who has made significant contributions to the campus through community building efforts and a dedication to peace building and understanding.

April 1 [Alzo Slade - Certainty is Overrated](#) 4:30-6PM

April 7 [Community Conversations](#) 4:30-6PM

April 27 Peacebuilding through Public History and Humanities:
(Social Change Speaker Series) 4:30-6PM

A Panel Discussion

At Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey:

May 1 Graduate Cohort Fellows Annual Seminar

Interested in Conflict Transformation? □ Consider enrolling in a class!

Undergraduate students who complete the five cluster components and a short reflection earn a CT Certificate. If you are interested in learning more, and seeing what courses are offered, head over to [go/ctcluster/](#) or [contact](#) Professor Sebnem Gumuscu

That's all... for now!

Follow~Contact~Engage



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