Greetings!

What a busy and exciting year we’ve had, thanks to great speakers and enthusiastic students.

We finished the year with a bang as HAP students prepared for the field by participating in a 4-day crisis simulation in cooperation with the International Disaster Psychology program. Teamwork pulled everyone together to create innovative project proposals and a better understanding of life in the field.

Congratulations to our graduating students who are now entering the field and good luck to our continuing students who are heading into impressive internships.

Read about all of the above in this Spring Quarterly!

Enjoy,
Chen Reis

The Humanitarian Assistance Certificate Program prepares students to work in the humanitarian field. The program provides students with the theoretical and practical underpinnings for humanitarian work which is technically sound, engages with affected communities, responds to the diverse needs of affected populations and sets the stage for sustainable and inclusive recovery and development.

STAYING CONNECTED

Portfolio
https://portfolio.du.edu/pc/port?portfolio=haprog

The HA Portfolio page is a great source to find information regarding the program. You’ll find the latest forms and requirements for the HA Certificate, as well as a calendar of upcoming events. Under the “Stay in Touch!” section, please join our Listserv and receive biweekly emails on our latest news and events.

Email
haprog@du.edu

Feel free to email HA with any questions, concerns or suggestions regarding this newsletter or other activities.

Facebook
www.facebook.com/du.haprog

Be sure to “like” HA’s Facebook page and stay up to date with news both here at Korbel and around the world.

Twitter
https://twitter.com/DU_Humanitarian

Follow our tweets for the latest buzz in the humanitarian world and live-tweeting during HA events.
Korbel alum John Ambler spoke to students on May 13 about his life and career as a Vice President of Strategy at Oxfam America.

Dr. Ambler participated in talk co-hosted by the Office of Career and Professional Development as a Professional in Residence. When it comes to career choice, Dr. Ambler encouraged students to follow their consciences, and reminded students that based on his experience, “Things will look up; your status is temporary.”

Regarding the structure of humanitarian aid positions, he said, “If you’re concerned about poverty, you need to be concerned about policy.”

Stressing the importance of policy, he noted that policy is a blunt object, and it has significant side effects. He noted that while addressing policy, there is a need to hobnob with the elite, “But hobnob with humility,” he joked.

Objecting to the word “participation” in development programs, he prefers “co-ownership” and “co-investment.” Dr. Ambler highlighted the importance of helping people in need to form groups, not forming groups for people.

“When people are willing to take risks if given power in their own development,” he said.

When asked about those who are entering the humanitarian workforce, Dr. Ambler noted that people need to be able to talk in the same professional language.

However, he said, “What we really need are people who can think across boundaries,” in reference to the usefulness of a cross-disciplinary background.

Dr. Ambler said that humanitarians should have good people skills to demonstrate advocacy ability. They should also be good thinkers and good negotiators who are able to compromise. He stressed that internships count in differentiating job candidates as a demonstration of their sacrifice and experience. He noted that breaking into the first job often requires the most sacrifice.

Dean Christopher Hill introduced Dr. Ambler for his evening talk, “Averting a Worldwide Humanitarian Food Crisis: Response, Resilience and Realignment for Our Agricultural Systems.”

Dr. Ambler argued that the new looming crisis in world food production has a different character than past crises and that confronting it will require a different and more diverse response to avert humanitarian catastrophe, especially for the world’s most vulnerable people. A successful response demands reform in national and international policies, key agricultural institutions and foreign aid.

Noting that one in eight people in the world is hungry, Dr. Ambler said, “We should be worried.” He then added, “Anytime someone comes up with a silver bullet for agriculture, be wary.” Dr. Ambler concluded by saying that moving forward on food security requires more research and massive global cooperation.
Maria Jessop, Senior Program Officer at the United States Institute of Peace’s Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding (USIP’s Academy), participated in the Center on Rights Development’s (CORD) April symposium, “From Failure to Flourish: Challenges in Global Education,” and was sponsored by the Humanitarian Assistance Program.

Maria, who has been part of USIP’s Iraq Team since 2008, believes education is the entry point for peacebuilding as it creates the chance to impact more people in the future. While attempting to explain to Iraqis the need for human rights education in a region often unfamiliar with the concept, she noted the importance of building from existing efforts and capabilities. She highlighted the need for beneficiaries to feel ownership to a program.

“This is not about you; it’s about being of service,” she concluded.

What is your career background?
I have been a Senior Program Officer with the USIP since late 2007 designing and implementing education and training programs in conflict resolution, dialogue, human rights and civic education. I’ve worked mostly in Iraq, Francophone Africa and Haiti. Prior to joining USIP, I was a mediator and conflict resolution trainer.

What experiences have most contributed to your career development?
My interest in peace-related work began with my experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in St. Lucia, Eastern Caribbean. Through my volunteer experience, I learned that profound change can happen through people-to-people programs, and that I could make a difference. Another influence was growing up in different countries. It made me gravitate towards international work because I enjoy learning from different cultures and I’m good at navigating them.

What do you find most challenging about developing education programs for conflict and post-conflict regions?
In order for a program to be sustainable, you need time -- multiple years in a lot of cases -- and funders don’t take this into account very often.

What challenges in your program are specific to Iraq?
In my largest project -- a civic education project with the Ministry of Education -- it took us four years to achieve most of our objectives, and I had to go on faith that funding would be renewed every year. We were lucky that it was. But another challenge was the security environment; it hampered mobility and access.

What advice would you give to students interested in conflict management?
It’s a large and growing field. Understand what aspect you want to work in. If it’s the hands-on work you want, be sure you master at least one other language and get some practical conflict resolution skills such as mediation under your belt. Taking courses in project management and evaluation are also useful.

How do you believe negotiations affect humanitarian aid work?
When you are in a humanitarian space, all sorts of negotiations happen since so many actors can be involved who have different interests, such as peacekeepers, the military, local police, healthcare workers, beneficaries, militants, aid workers, etc. Negotiation skills allow you to understand your own interests and those of others and help you to build cooperative relationships in a complicated space.

Any words of wisdom for Korbel students who want to pursue a career in humanitarian assistance?
Be sure that you know how to take good care of yourself as well as other people. It’s very demanding work.
Panel on Women’s Security in the Field

HA was joined by Denver Women in International Security to present a panel to discuss the security of women in the field of humanitarian assistance, as organized by HA student Amanda Livingstone. International Disaster Psychology professor Courtney Mitchell moderated the discussion, joined by Adjunct Professor Sue Weinstein, Korbel alum and RPCV Kyle Horton, and current MA student Liyam Eloul.

Prof. Mitchell began by noting the disturbing trend in the humanitarian field to give men hero status for surviving bombings while women are often stigmatized by rape. She informed the audience that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder rates are higher in women and compounded by stressful situations such as humanitarian field work.

Horton discussed his experience as a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer from Honduras, where the Peace Corps program was recently suspended due to increased violence following political uprising. He became aware of many attacks on women, but said that Peace Corps did a good job of supporting victims and providing mental health care. Horton advised that those on the ground administering international development should make local friends, learn the language and adapt to cultural norms as much as possible.

Eloul discussed her time in the Middle East, echoing Horton’s sentiment that befriending neighbors while in the field can create an important safety net. As a student of International Disaster Psychology, she noted the need to find healthy alternatives to dealing with stress, particularly through friendships with people in the field who can sympathize. Otherwise, there is a risk of “crash and burn” syndrome. The alternative may be substance abuse, to which women become particularly susceptible to sexual attacks.

Prof. Weinstein reflected on her experience in Darfur and the need to weigh comfort versus safety. She noted the importance of being aware of one’s environment and maintaining contact with coworkers in the field. She also reiterated the importance of care for personal mental health during the immense stress of field work. Based on her experience, Weinstein is now launching a counseling service for overseas humanitarian workers.

“Trust your instincts and make smart choices,” Weinstein said, emphasizing, “Nobody cares about your security as much as you do.”

Professor Chen Reis stressed the need to always get a security briefing. “You are the best judge of your own safety. You can say no,” she said of risky situations.

A representative from the University of Denver’s Campus Safety team attended to inform students of the option to take a self-defense class, Rape Aggression Defense (R.A.D.) system, available monthly to women only.

More information:
http://www.du.edu/campussafety/crimeprevention/rad.html
Dale Buscher, Senior Director for Programs at the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) spoke to Korbel students on April 29 about a career encompassing refugee livelihoods, youth, gender, and sexual and reproductive health. He has worked with Vietnamese boat people in the Philippines, Haitian refugees interned at Guantanamo Bay, displaced Kurds in Northern Iraq, Bosnian refugees in Croatia and Kosovars in Albania and Kosovo.

He was confused when, as a man, he was first asked to work for the WRC. The WRC Executive Director replied, “If a man like you doesn’t get it, how can we convince others?” This sparked a realization that gender equality cannot happen without voices from all sides. “You can’t be a humanitarian worker and not understand that gender matters,” Buscher said.

To enact change in programming, Buscher believes in listening to populations and advocating to donors regarding meeting realistic expectations. Within an organization, he stressed the need for good communication between policy and what takes place on the ground using a rights-based approach. “We need smart people in the field,” noted Buscher.

He advised students to specialize but also generalize. “You need to look beyond your focus. You need humility and rapport with the community. Sit, listen and learn.”

When tackling a project, Buscher highlighted the need to target the most vulnerable while also considering the objective of the program. He noted the importance of using appropriate intervention and not reaching beyond competency which may risk doing harm. Buscher repeatedly stressed the importance of developing a rapport with communities: it is more important to help people fix things themselves, not fix things for them. “People are vulnerable, but people are also resilient,” he said.

Buscher clarified, “It’s not about charity; it’s about working with communities and recognizing them as partners.”

Abigail Erikson, IRC

Abigail Erikson is a licensed clinical social worker in sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence (GBV) programming in the United States and Southeast Asia. Most recently, Erikson managed GBV response and prevention programming in Burmese refugee camps with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and currently acts as a senior technical advisor with the IRC Women’s Protection and Empowerment Technical Team. She spoke to Korbel students on April 30.

Erikson said that there is a perception of great emphasis on GBV and women and girls programming, though in actuality funding is minimal. She said there is a need for negotiating the prioritization of GBV and women’s issues, and that diplomacy plays a huge role in this kind of work.

She noted the benefit of finding an organization to work with where one can grow. If someone wants to work in the humanitarian field, he has to trust the process. She said that it is vital to be grounded in a project and to learn what is important to the community involved.

Erikson noted that a good launching point for such a career is to participate in challenging situations outside of the normal comfort zone in order to learn confidence. “Just go,” she said, remarking that if someone wants to work internationally, they should just do it.

She stressed the need to prove that a humanitarian worker cannot only survive but hang out in tough situations. “Can you cope in the field? You have to want it.” “Take risks,” Erikson said. “I didn’t start at the top; I built up to it.”
HA / IDP CRISIS SIMULATION

As students entered Week 10 of the Spring Quarter, some students had more than papers and exams on their minds. Twenty-six students from the Humanitarian Assistance program and International Disaster Psychology program learned firsthand about the stresses and sleep deprivation involved when working in the field during a humanitarian crisis.

During the rigorous four-day crisis training and simulation which took place in a mock version of Chad, students from both programs combined their skills to tackle a Protection cluster needs assessment and project proposal. Directors of the programs, Professor Chen Reis and Dr. Courtney Welton-Mitchell, organized the event to combine lectures, trainings and hands-on experience. Five-member teams represented organizations such as UNHCR, UNICEF, IRC and IMC in roles ranging from Child Protection Officer to Emergency Mental Health Officer.

Throughout the entire program, students learned from and then were tenaciously followed by BBC journalists Ian Cartwright and Dumeetha Luthra, who taught students the importance of sticking to the mission message in the field while talking to media in order to best advocate for a delicate but urgent situation. Eric Goodwin led a technology seminar in order to inform students about options for data gathering, and then implemented a KoBo Toolbox program to help students gather information by phone.

In the final two days, students dove into their roles, tackling the confusion and chaos of the field. Students left with better familiarity of the demanding life of a field worker and greater appreciation of the hard work that leads to humanitarian change.

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“The Sim provided us an opportunity to implement our communications skills and to gauge our academic knowledge and performance in an intense humanitarian scenario. Sleep deprivation, security concerns -- it was one of the best experiences I’ve had at Korbel!”

-- Irina Karic

“This was an amazing experience that really gave me a much more realistic picture of what it will be like in the field. I can’t imagine anybody deploying to the field having never had training like this!”

-- Christi Yoder
Amanda Livingstone
What are your immediate plans after graduation?
My immediate plans include moving to DC to intern with Save the Children’s School of Health and Nutrition.

What are your big picture plans?
My big picture plans include interning for the summer with Save and being hired in the fall, working in DC for a year or two, and then applying to field positions within Save once I have acquired solid work experience.

How will you be incorporating your HA certificate?
My HA certificate has already proven useful through the interview process in that I was able to use handbooks, guidelines, jargon and crisis examples that we have gone over from class. If it was helpful then, I can only imagine how helpful it will be in the future.

What did you gain from your time at Korbel?
I believe the most helpful information I received from Korbel/HAP includes learning how to locate and navigate handbooks/guidelines/databases/financial documents/etc. in a thorough and effective manner, as well as listening to personal anecdotes provided by professors, fellow students and guest speakers about what life is truly like in the field and how all of the aforementioned information is actually utilized in a humanitarian crisis.

Any advice for fellow Korbelians?
A piece of advice that I can offer to fellow students: make the most of your internships -- do as much as you can whenever you can -- and really try to establish personal connections with your supervisors and fellow interns. And make sure you stay in touch after your internship has ended!

Kelly O’Connor
What are your immediate plans after graduation?
I will be moving out East to Boston. I have an internship with Oxfam America in their Humanitarian Response Department and will be conducting research on trends in the humanitarian system, specifically focusing on local capacity building.

What are your big picture plans?
I hope to continue geographically focusing on South Sudan. I have applied for several positions with large INGOs and would ideally find myself back in country working on issues of gender and protection and greater crisis prevention and recovery.

Any advice for fellow Korbelians?
Take advantage of the incredible guest speakers the HA program brings in and the events it puts together. In addition to discussing interesting and pertinent topics, they provide great networking opportunities.

Also, really use your status as a graduate student at Korbel to procure top-notch internships -- which often can lead to full-time employment -- or at the very least provide you with 1) good, marketable experience for your résumé; and 2) important contacts for your future work in the humanitarian field.

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Pedro Perera

What are your immediate plans after graduation?
The first thing I will do is get 9 solid hours of sleep! Then it will be time to enjoy the summer. I will be travelling to China for the first time in my life. As part of the Global Theory in Practice course at the Daniels College of Business, I will be conducting research for Opera Software’s subsidiary in China on whether it would be feasible for Opera Software to carry out an advertisement campaign in Shanghai and Beijing. This research will involve on-site visits to both cities, where I will be conducting a rapid assessment to evaluate the behavior of the Chinese consumer. For the rest of the summer and part of the fall, I am hoping to do an internship with a humanitarian organization, but I am still waiting to hear from them.

What are your big picture plans, and how will you be incorporating your HA certificate?
In a few years after I have collected enough experience, my long-term career plan is to lead an organization that has the vision of mitigating the impact of natural disasters and complex emergencies by providing essential information that facilitates a clear understanding of the needs of vulnerable populations.

To achieve this goal, I hope to use multi-sector assessment tools that encourage coordination among humanitarian actors. I would also like to advocate for greater adherence to humanitarian principles following a disaster, especially from humanitarian and state actors.

What will you remember about Korbel?
I will always remember the intense debates during classes, and the passion my fellow students have to make a difference in the world. Besides the rigorous academic setting, I grew immensely at Korbel by working, cooperating and competing with classmates from different parts of the world who share a commitment to growth and a desire for achievement.

Although I look forward to the next step in my career path, there is no doubt in my mind that Korbel was the best place to pursue a masters in International Studies as well as a certificate in Humanitarian Assistance.

Any advice for fellow Korbelians?
My number one advice to incoming students is to take advantage of the Office of Career & Professional Development and find an internship with their help. Korbel has an extensive network of alumni around the world, who are willing to help fellow Korbelians achieve their professional aspirations.

Teresa Baranowski
Save the Children
Washington, DC
Humanitarian Policy & Advocacy Intern

I will be working with the International Humanitarian Response team on policy and advocacy projects in current humanitarian emergencies, and attending Congressional sessions and meetings with NGO working groups. My focus is policy and response to humanitarian emergencies, and this internship will give me practical experience in both.

Rachael Davis
IASC Secretariat
New York City

I will organize meetings, work on social media projects and perform research. I believe that this experience will be invaluable because I will be working in the environment where major decisions are made regarding the humanitarian system, and I will be getting updated information on humanitarian situations around the world. Also, understanding the UN system will be important as it is the major player in the humanitarian world.

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Miriam Edwards  
Relief International  
Washington, DC  
Middle East Programs Intern

I will be working with a three-person team, assisting in report and proposal editing, writing program summaries and assisting in developing program communication material, assisting on creating or revising program budgets and other tasks as assigned. I’m interested in emergency aid in post-conflict zones as well as transition from emergency assistance to development. The Middle East is a good region for the variety of interventions going on right now, and I hope to be exposed to operational processes and policy activities.

Irina Karic  
International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)  
New York City

I will be working as a researcher, assisting with the new project on education and peace building in post-conflict societies. As I am particularly focusing on education in my studies at Korbel, whether in emergency settings or as a post-conflict reconciliatory tool, I am excited to further my research skills and see how my passion for work in these fragile contexts evolves.

Jessica Kovarik  
Save the Children  
Washington, DC  
Education in Emergencies Intern

I will help draft key technical resources for Save the Children’s Education in Emergencies department. I will be focusing on Save’s Early Childhood Development framework, and points of intersection with other sectors, specifically nutrition, child protection and livelihoods. Additionally, I will conduct a desk review of current and previous emergency response programs. I’d really like to end up working in some capacity on child protection during crisis. I was drawn to the internship as education has the potential to play a significant role in a child’s life, as well as their protection. I am looking forward to gaining a more in-depth knowledge of the various tools EiE has as well as current and past programming.

Christi Yoder  
InterAction  
Washington, DC  
Humanitarian Policy & Practice Group

Along with the obligatory administrative duties helping out the other group members, I will be given a significant research project to work on. My long term career goal is to get into humanitarian policy.
ALUMNI PROFILE

Read about what Korbel graduates are doing now, how they feel their education contributed to their career development and what advice they offer to grads entering the humanitarian field.

Paul Rebman, Catholic Relief Services

What is your career background?
Prior to attending the Korbel School (GSIS), I was the director of a small children’s home and primary school in northern Honduras. The project was involved in several forms of community outreach and small scale health, water and hygiene development programming. My time in Honduras really sparked my interest in the field of international development, resulting in my decision to pursue a Master’s degree from the Korbel School in International Development. While attending DU, I took advantage of the internship opportunity and traveled to Peru and Bolivia, working for Trickle Up for 8 months during the summer after my first year as well as the fall quarter of my second year. I wrote my Master’s Thesis on Disaster Mitigation, which led to my initial job out of DU at an organization called World Relief, in Baltimore, as a Program Officer in the Disaster Response department. During my first three years at World Relief, I held various positions such as Disaster Response Program Officer, Disaster Response Programs Manager, Indonesia Tsunami Response Project Director, Indonesia Java Earthquake Project Director, Indonesia Deputy Country Director, South Sudan Interim Country Director, as well as being very involved in programs in Darfur and DRC. My second three years at World Relief were as the Director of the Disaster Response department, overseeing all facets of the team’s work, including country-specific oversight and strategic planning, the development of an organizational rapid response strategy and rapid response team, oversight of the organization’s Disaster Risk Reduction framework, as well as field level oversight of rapid onset emergencies such as the Haiti Earthquake.

In January 2011, I transitioned from World Relief to Catholic Relief Services, with a combined role of Public Donor Liaison (supporting 12 CRS country offices in Africa, including Mali, Sudan and South Sudan in USG funding proposals and program implementation) along with a spot on the CRS Emergency Roster for rapid onset deployment.

Please describe your job and what you find most challenging.
I find my work to be very rewarding, with a combination of field site travel and the opportunity to learn from and experience projects at the implementation level. I am also involved with headquarters-level strategy planning which cuts across individual programs to attempt to learn from new and innovative implementation tools and techniques in an effort to ensure maximum sustainability and community ownership of program activities. The most challenging component of the work is continually seeing bad things happen to good people. In nearly all programs I have been involved in, I worked with extremely motivated, skilled and kind community members with all the desire and talent to improve their situation. However, due to factors outside of their control -- such as natural disasters, conflict, political or ethnic strife, or state level injustices -- the structures of poverty and loss continue to weigh heavy on very good people. Greed and power overtake goodwill and effort. Lack of access to resources, hunger, disease and disaster takes lives without prejudice. Families are torn apart and knocked back to square one. Poverty increases vulnerability; vulnerability increases poverty. As much as I see it, it continues to be the most challenging component of the job; it makes me lose sleep.

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ALUMNI PROFILE, cont.

What experiences have most contributed to your career development?
Overall, the opportunities I have had to live, work and travel overseas and be involved with program implementation at the field level have been the most valuable components of my career development. Particularly in disaster situations with smaller organizations, little attention is paid to job descriptions in the early days of a disaster. The needs are great and everyone is doing all they can to meet those needs. The level of rapid experience and learning which takes place cannot be replicated.

How did Korbel contribute to your career development?
My time at Korbel was an integral piece to my overall career development. From the onset, professors took the time to learn my interests, background and skillset and assisted me in thinking about my future interests. The professors were instrumental in making introductions to people working in the areas I was interested in, allowing access to networks and information sources to learn the industry from people in the industry.

From a coursework perspective, many of the classes were useful and applicable, particularly classes such as International Project Management and Project Analysis. On a larger scale, the Korbel program taught me and refined my skills in critical thinking, judgment and decision making. The environment of Korbel was one of respect and openness, allowing and encouraging students to develop, present and defend opinions are various issues during any given class. This environment of respect fostered in me the confidence to know that I had valuable contributions to make, original ideas, and that I could defend these if needed.

Finally, the flexibility offered by Korbel to design an academic program based on my interests and skills added to my career development. The fact that I was afforded the opportunity to stay in Peru and Bolivia not only for a full summer but also for the fall quarter was a very valuable overseas experience, and one that was noticed by my first employer when reviewing my CV.

Do you have any words of wisdom for Korbel students?
(1) Be patient. (2) Make the most of every experience, allowing it to be an opportunity for learning and growth. (3) Do not be turned off by job descriptions which you may feel are “beneath” you. The job market is tight, particularly with a questionable US government funding forecast. Every job is an opportunity to outwork your job description and be noticed for the excellent work you are doing. Getting into an organization or the industry is the most difficult step. Once you are in, if you do good work, moving up will come quickly. (4) Keep in touch with your classmates and professors – networking and knowing people is highly valuable.

ORGANIZATION SPOTLIGHT

Save the Children is one of the world’s preeminent humanitarian organizations for responding to the needs of children in emergencies, focusing both domestically and across 120 countries worldwide.

Global program areas include child protection (e.g. family reunification, protection from exploitation), education and child development (e.g. improve humanitarian access, gender equality), health and nutrition (e.g. emergency maternal care, nutrition intervention), HIV/AIDS and family livelihoods (e.g. emergency food for families, financial education). American programs focus on childhood development and nutrition in impoverished communities.

Learn more at their web site:
www.SaveTheChildren.org