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Promoting Human Rights through the Professions (abstract)

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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2015 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

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Research Panel: Engaging in Human Rights Work

Presenters: Debra L. DeLaet, Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science and Herb & Karen Baum Chair of Ethics and the Professions, Drake University; Holly G. Atkinson, MD, Past President, Physicians for Human Rights, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Preventive Medicine and Director of the Human Rights Program, Arnhold Global Health Institute, Mount Sinai Medical Center; Emily Sadecki, Undergraduate Assistant for the Baum Chair of Ethics and the Professions, Drake University

Title: Promoting Human Rights through the Professions

Abstract: This paper examines the ways in which professionals in a range of fields—the health professions, education, journalism, and law to name just a few—have the capacity to engage in critical work in the promotion of human rights. Whereas the scholarly study of human rights focuses largely on formal law and governance processes, this paper explores how strategies for promoting human rights might be integrated into the everyday work lives of professionals. Our focus on this everyday lever for human rights promotion seeks to broaden the vision of what constitutes human rights and justice work by exploring the capacities of actors that are not formally part of the international human rights regime. We will focus especially on health professionals as potential advocates for human rights. To this end, our paper will include case studies of Dr. Holly Atkinson’s work with Physicians for Human Rights and her work as Director of the Human Rights Program at Mount Sinai Medical Center, which trains future physicians to do basic human rights work. We also consider the role of professional associations, particularly national medical associations, as potential vehicles for advancing fundamental human rights through the setting of professional standards, norm diffusion, and lobbying.

Keywords: human rights promotion, health professions, professional associations, human rights in the everyday

Contributor Biographies:

Debra L. DeLaet currently holds the Herb & Karen Baum Chair of Ethics and the Professions at Drake University, where she also serves as the Chair of the Department of Political Science. Her major teaching and research interests are in the area of human rights, global health, and gender issues in world politics. She has published three books: *U.S. Immigration Policy in an Age of Rights* (Praeger 2000), *The Global Struggle for Human Rights* (Wadsworth, 2006), and (co-authored with David E. DeLaet) *Global Health in the 21st Century: the Globalization of Disease and Wellness* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012). In addition to these books, she has published numerous articles and book chapters in her areas of interest. Professor DeLaet has been recognized as the 2007 Honors Program Teacher of the Year, the 2011 Arts & Sciences Teacher of the Year, and the 2012 Stalnaker Lecturer at Drake University.

Dr. Holly Atkinson is Assistant Professor in the Department of Preventive Medicine as well as Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Medicine, where she co-directs the Advancing Idealism in Medicine Program along with Dr. Jon Ripp at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. While working in Indonesia during her medical internship at the University of Rochester's Strong Memorial Hospital, Dr. Atkinson became deeply interested in global health and the social determinants of disease. She subsequently became involved with Physicians for Human Rights, the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization, serving on its board for more than 16 years, including four years as its president. Today, her research focuses on documenting the linkages between the social determinants of disease and health outcomes, especially as it applies to the well-being of women and girls. She has conducted research in several countries around the world, including most recently Bahrain and Burma.

Emily Sadecki is a junior at Drake University. She is pursuing a double major in Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology and Public Relations. She serves as the undergraduate assistant to Professor DeLaet in her role as Baum Chair of Ethics and the Professions. She is planning a future career in public health, with a focus on maternal/ family health and health policy. Emily has worked as an intern at the Iowa Department of Public Health and as a public affairs intern at the Mayo Clinic. She also serves as a Violence Intervention Partner at Drake University and as a Young Women's Resource Center Tutor and Mentor in Des Moines, Iowa.