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University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



Research To Make a Difference

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The University of Dayton has received a \$100,000 commitment from Dallas alumnus Peter McGrath to spur greater faculty and student research in human rights and social justice issues.

The University of Dayton is a pioneer in human rights education. In 1998, the University launched the country's first undergraduate human rights program. A decade later, the University of Dayton began offering one of the nation's first bachelor's degrees in human rights studies.

Through the Peter McGrath Human Rights Fellows Program, the University will award \$10,000 stipends to seven faculty members to enable them to conduct and publish interdisciplinary research that promotes human dignity and alleviates suffering. Faculty selected as McGrath Fellows will involve undergraduate and graduate students in their research, which may take them to parts of the world grappling with genocide, poverty and other human rights issues. It's all part of the Catholic social justice tradition at the University of Dayton.

"In my heart, I believe that through education, we can begin to bring an end to human rights abuses," said McGrath, who graduated in 1972 with a bachelor's degree in English and enjoyed a 37-year career with the JC Penney Co. that took him to factories and mills all over the world. "If we can relieve, in some way, shape or form, human rights abuses and respect the souls of people, we can start to change the world."

McGrath, a member of the University's College of Arts and Sciences advisory council, logged more than 10 million air miles in various executive positions with JC Penney, one of the country's largest retailers. He's recognized as a leader in the global apparel trade.

"I've witnessed firsthand the impoverishment of people and the human rights abuses that surround poverty," said McGrath, who retired as executive vice president and director of private brands, product development and sourcing in 2010 and started his own consulting firm. "Whenever I go back to Bangladesh, India or Pakistan, I retouch the depths of poverty. I'll stand on a street corner, stare into the eyes of people and see the frailty of the human condition."

Richard Hiskes, a senior political theorist at the University of Connecticut who edits the *Journal of Human Rights*, will offer a workshop on campus this winter for faculty interested in developing human rights research proposals. The McGrath Fellows, who will be chosen in mid-March, will participate in two human rights colloquiums in fall 2012 and spring 2013 before presenting their research at a major international human rights conference on campus in fall 2013. The fellows will recruit nationally recognized scholars in human rights studies to be part of the panels at the conference.

Mark Ensalaco, director of the human rights studies program at the University of Dayton, called McGrath's \$100,000 commitment "a tremendous gift that will support research that will be transformative for human rights studies."

The Peter McGrath Research Fellows program is envisioned as the first step toward raising funds to endow a human rights center at the University of Dayton, according to Ensalaco.

"It's impossible to underestimate the importance of this gift. We're educating future human rights professionals as part of our Catholic, Marianist mission," Ensalaco said. "We want to ask deeper questions about social justice. We want to think more intentionally about the underlying questions of poverty. We recognize that Catholic social teaching has important insights into issues of dignity and human justice."

Over two decades, the University of Dayton has offered major international conferences on a wide range of human rights issues, including the rights of the child, violence against women, truth and reconciliation, and human trafficking. Lobbying by University of Dayton students played a significant role in the passage of Ohio Senate Bill 235, which makes human trafficking a felony offense. The University also has established the Monsignor Oscar Romero Human Rights Award to honor the ministry and martyrdom of the Salvadoran archbishop, who was slain while officiating Mass more than 30 years ago because of his vocal defense of the rights of the poor and disenfranchised. In 2010, the University bestowed the honor on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services for advocating for laws to stiffen penalties for human traffickers and providing protection to victims.

Approximately 40 students are currently pursuing a degree in human rights studies at the University of Dayton.

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