Partners in Peace: A Sketch for a Link between the Nobel Peace Prize and NCHC

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Abstract: In a plenary address at the 2023 NCHC annual conference in Chicago, the former Vice Chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee issued a challenge for honors students and educators to use their voices and positions of local leadership to promote peace. The call for peace advocacy extended in Chicago resonated with the large audience, as leadership development represents a high-impact practice that many honors programs embrace. As national and international conflicts produce increasing polarization and divisiveness that seep into our campuses and local communities, the urgency for honors students to hone critical thinking and practical skills needed for citizen leadership and peacemaking magnify.

Nobel Peace Prize laureates are diverse and interdisciplinary exemplars that honors educators can utilize as they seek to inspire and instruct students who strive to fulfill the Chicago challenge. Drawing content from the history and laureates of the Nobel Peace Prize, we provide two tested educational modules designed to illuminate a wide lexicon of strategies and practices that leaders employ in their pursuit of peace. We share best practices gleaned from eight years of honors curricular and co-curricular program development, enriched by consultation with leaders from the Norwegian Nobel Institute, the Norwegian Nobel Committee, and the Nobel Peace Center. A link of mutual value exists between NCHC member institutions and the legacy of Alfred Nobel, which we call *Partners in Peace*. The models offer easy adoption logistics for NCHC institutions of any composition. We conclude with future possibilities, a few poised for adoption by NCHC's International Education Committee.

Keywords: Nobel Peace Prize; honors colleges; peace leadership; curriculum
Citation: *Honors in Practice*, 2024, Vol. 20: 173–202

INTRODUCTION

The Nobel Peace Prize has been defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of World History* as the world's most prestigious prize (Palmowski). While oftentimes controversial, it remains a prize to which the whole world pays attention, some—not least the authoritarian regimes that land in the crosshairs of the Nobel Committee—with anger and resentment, others with deep admiration.

Being awarded by and most often given to men and women of mature age, and addressing complex political problems, does the Nobel Peace Prize speak to young people? Can it play a living, meaningful role in the way we shape the leadership skills of our students and their willingness to work for peace, reconciliation, and understanding in a world fraught with division, anger, and serious challenges?

We believe, based on real-life honors college experience, that the Peace Prize can indeed play such a role. The purpose of this article is to give some inroads into how that can be done, based on experience from several Nobel—we would even add noble—ventures at an American collegiate institution.

HARMONY AND CONFLICT

On any given day, many of our campuses are rife with disharmony. Diversity of opinion often fuels disagreement. Unfortunately, when left unchecked, disagreements can fester into conflict and hostility and become major deterrents to a peaceful community. Communication scholars Hocker et al., define conflict as an "expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals" (3). While few begin their day with the thought, *what conflict can I find to engage in today*? avoiding conflict is a real problem and can exacerbate rather than alleviate disharmony and enmity. Conflicts need to be engaged with and confronted. Indeed, skilled leaders find engaging with and mediating conflict a healthy exercise.

Reviewing Hocker et al.'s definition, three words become keys to hopeful resolution. First, the struggle is *expressed*. All parties engaged are aware of discord, no one is surprised, and parties are communicating with one another. Second, the parties are *interdependent*, suggesting that

disagreeing parties recognize they must co-exist. Third, the challenges and disagreements are *perceived*, giving hope to paths to clarifying misunderstandings and discovering common ground. Thus, conflict becomes a tool for leadership, enabling those engaged, representing distinctly differing points of view, the opportunity to communicate and embrace the best practices of listening, reflection, and critical reasoning. Through such practice, those with sincerely held positions can begin to recognize the essence of legitimacy in the convictions of others. In so doing, individuals may also discover that sincerity is not necessarily a virtue: sometimes we can be sincerely wrong.

As intellectual leaders on our campuses, those involved in honors are well positioned to champion peace. Peace is, in line with what we have just expressed, not the same as avoidance of controversial issues. This is also central to the idea of democratic rule: democracy demands dialogue and sometimes confrontation. While civility and respect for human dignity must remain supreme, neither virtue negates public expression of disagreement and alternative points of view. Indeed, higher education and particularly honors education are supposed to motivate individuals to confront hard questions through the aforementioned best practices of listening, reflection, and critical insight. To do less would illustrate the fate of those who ignore one of John F. Kennedy's favorite quotations, which he attributed to Dante, "The hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who in time of moral crisis preserve their neutrality."[1] As citizen leaders, it is incumbent upon honors students and the honors community to advocate peace through informed, reasoned, and responsible stands on issues of the day, many of which are indeed controversial.

In his plenary address, delivered on Saturday, November 11, at the 2023 NCHC annual conference in Chicago, Dr. Henrik Syse, former Vice Chair of the Norwegian Nobel Peace Committee (and co-author of this article), challenged the close to 1000 honors students, faculty, administrators, and staff in attendance to actively seek opportunities to promote peace practices in their communities and on their campuses. We claim that one way we can heed this call comes through the intentional study and emulation of the leadership skills and practices of recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize.

THE FORCE OF NOBEL

The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded annually in Oslo, Norway, on December 10, commemorating the death of the Prize's benefactor, scientist and

industrialist Alfred Nobel. Since its inaugural presentation in 1901 to Henri Dunant of Switzerland and Frederic Passy of France, the prize, in accordance with language in Nobel's will, has been awarded in (most) successive years to individuals or organizations that have done the most or the best work within the past year to promote "fraternity between nations, the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses" (Lundestad 20). It is one of five Nobel prizes—the four other prizes (for physics, chemistry, medicine or physiology, and literature), alongside an added award given in Nobel's memory (for economics)—handed out in Nobel's homeland of Sweden.[2]

A clear irony exists in that Alfred Nobel's funding, earned in large part from the scientific discovery of dynamite—an invention with great utility for violence and warfighting—would be used for the promotion of peace (Stenersen et al., *Grand History* 10–11). While dynamite was unquestionably made for greater ease for laborers who toiled in vocations such as mining of materials from the earth and those who built transportation routes that could now go through rather than over mountains, it did not take long for political actors to make violent use of Nobel's noble invention. This paradox indeed underlies all the prizes awarded under Nobel's name since every one of the prizes was meant by Nobel to further the cause of humanity.

Notably, a Nobel Prize was never intended as a recipient's crowning, end-of-life glory or a laurel that recipients would rest upon. Alfred Nobel "wanted the prize to be a new beginning for its recipients, not an end to their stories" (Dean and Jendzurski 103). In his own reflections about the use of the prize by its recipients, Nobel mused, "I wish to help the dreamers, as they find it difficult to get on in life" (qtd. in Abrams 8). This emphasis on providing inspiration to others connects well and clearly with the value of educating youth—dreamers seeking new beginnings—about the positive contributions made to humanity through the promotion of peace.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureates, particularly in the current century, demonstrate global representation. Between 1901 and 2023, recipients hail from 51 countries ("Winners of the Nobel Prize"). The diversity the prize enjoys is relatively recent. Prior to 1936, when the prize was awarded to Argentinian Carlos Saavedra Lamas, the 35 recipients came exclusively from 11 European nations and the United States. Lamas also represents the first peace laureate from south of the equator and the first person of color. The first Black recipient, South African Albert John Luthuli, received his prize in 1960, and the first Asian to accept the award was Eisaku Sato from Japan in 1974. Bertha von Suttner, the Austrian-Hungarian friend and confidant

of Alfred Nobel, earns the distinction, granted in 1905, of being the first woman to hold the prize. American Jane Addams followed von Suttner 26 years later and was subsequently joined, in more recent years, by 17 other women, including the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate for 2023, Iranian Narges Mohammadi.

The laureates of the first 34 years of the prize (1901–1935) were all white male recipients, apart from two white women (Stenersen et al., *Nobel Peace* 22-123). The contrast between those first 34 years and the most recent 34 years (1989–2023) is dramatic in the latter's celebration of diversity. That latter span saw 41 individuals from 29 countries gaining recognition. The countries spanned the globe with two in South America, five in the Middle East, seven in Africa, eight in Asia, and a combined six between Europe and the United States (although the European Union as an institution won the prize in 2012, adding to the European tally). While men still dominate, women claimed the prize a dozen times within this time period. The greatest difference comes with race: 74% of recipients after 1989 have been persons of color. This increasing diversity arguably serves as an inspiration to today's students while reinforcing the prestige of the prize.

The research and critical reflection demanded from the five members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, who ultimately determine the recipient(s) of the prize, arguably represent a daunting task. No laureate will receive universal praise, and external voices are often quick to push back, challenging the committee's decision. Questioning the committee becomes heightened when forecasters attempt to predict the nominee and believe they can scoop the formal announcement, only to discover the inaccuracy of their hypothesis. Videos posted on the official website of the Nobel Prizes (nobelprize.org) provide valuable illustrations for classroom discussion and analysis. A recent example came in 2019, during the press briefing immediately following the Norwegian Nobel Committee Chair Berit Reiss-Andersen's announcement of Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed as that year's laureate (nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2019/prize-announcement, 11:27–12:03). A journalist from *Climate Home News* expresses disappointment that the young Swedish environmental activist, Greta Thunberg, had not gained recognition and presents Reiss-Andersen with an assertion that preceded his question, "Greta Thunberg was bookmakers' overwhelming favorite, what do you say to her supporters who are disappointed today?" (nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2019/prize-announcement, 11:27–11:32). As the press well knows, the deliberations of the committee are held in strict confidence. Knowing her fiduciary responsibility, Reiss-Andersen, through a firm smile, dismissed the question

by responding, "On the day we announce the prize, we never comment on who didn't get the prize, who could have had the prize, or [about whom] the bookmakers speculated, and so I have no comment to that" (nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2019/prize-announcement, 11:33–12:03). A truly awkward pause ensues within the press, lasting a full 12 seconds, before another journalist offers a more appropriate question for the context.

The 2019 prize to Abiy Ahmed illustrates a controversial prize. The controversy gained heightened energy by the fact that Ethiopia, only a year after the prize was awarded, fell into a protracted civil war, with the Nobel Laureate as one of the conflict's protagonists. There are several other controversial prizes through the decades; laureates such as Henry Kissinger and Aung San Suu Kyi come to mind. But the committee cannot predict the future, and it surely recognizes the risk involved in making determinations in the moment, which future evidence may call into question.

Yet, at many points, the Peace Prize has become a clear catalyst for change or an inspiration to continue a difficult battle. Prizes awarded to human-rights defenders behind the Iron Curtain or in apartheid South Africa prior to the fall of the regimes in question, or the prize awarded to Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos in 2016 for the Colombian Peace Agreement, shortly after that same agreement had been narrowly rejected in a referendum—the Nobel Prize arguably rescuing the ensuing peace process—remind us of the power of the prize (see Santos 364–68).

The prizes that have proved controversial over the years illustrate how the Peace Prize can be an excellent tool for leadership reflection and training for students. Through such prizes the students recognize that no action taken in pursuit of peace is foolproof. To take a famous example, in 1973, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the prize jointly to Henry Kissinger from the United States and Le Duc Tho from North Vietnam. The decision was so contentious, even within the committee, that two members ultimately resigned (Lundestad 68). When the announcement was made in October of that year, the official rationale for the decision grew from the men's work in "the 1973 Paris agreement intended to bring about a cease-fire in the Vietnam war and a withdrawal of American forces" (Lundestad 205). As the United States Secretary of State and the envoy from North Vietnam, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho led the Paris negotiations that, in the moment, provided the world hope for resolution. Time would prove the agreement a failed exercise. Le Duc Tho shocked the committee and the world with his unprecedented decision to decline the prize, claiming the Paris agreement was not being implemented. Journalist and Nobel chronicler Jay Nordlinger

holds that the rationale was farcical as the lack of implementation fell on the North Vietnamese. "Kissinger puts it very well," in Nordlinger's view, "when he says that this was 'another insolence' on the part of North Vietnam: Its violations had, in fact, turned the agreement into a 'farce'" (Nordlinger 205). The Nobel Committee continues listing Le Duc Tho as a Nobel Laureate, signifying that "you can refuse the committee but that does not mean the committee can refuse you" (Nordlinger 35). The war re-intensified after the awarding of the prize, which compounded the controversy. Recent release of classified documents, showing Kissinger's hawkish approach to Vietnam and Cambodia, swelled the cloud of controversy and ultimately haunted Kissinger for the remainder of his life (DePasquale).

Again, we see how the Nobel Peace Prize—both at its best and in its most controversial moments—provides brilliant material for teaching the challenges of political and community leadership. Fortunately, it is safe to say that the examples of excellence and courage outnumber the cases of destructive disharmony and controversy.

TIMES OF CRISIS

Essayist and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson is widely attributed with the proclamation that times of terror are times of heroism. His sentiment suggests that in times of crisis, individuals with integrity and moral conviction will step forward with words and deeds that inspire their audiences to purposeful actions that lead to resolution of conflict. Nobel Peace Prize laureates at their best epitomize Emerson's view through their willingness, amid disharmony, to use their voices and commit to actions with the goal of achieving peace. Simply stated, laureates are leaders whose oftentimes courageous acts resonate with students and make the laureates meritorious for study in honors curricula. Identifying and then putting into practice particular skills of effective leadership that the laureates have successfully mastered equip our students to better address societal challenges they face within the moment.

Student leadership development is an often-stated outcome in honors education. Greg Lanier crafted a rubric suitable for program review exercises that highlights an alignment of leadership theory and practice to both the curricular and co-curricular best practices of honors education (Lanier). Leadership studies celebrate the interdisciplinarity prized in honors education that defies disciplinary silos as witnessed by the use of scholarly contributions from philosophical and political classics (such as

Plato, Lao-Tzu, and Machiavelli), historians and political scientists (such as Burns, Greenstein, Kellerman, Putnam, and Wills), psychologists (such as Csikszentmihalyi and French and Raven), business scholars (such as Bass, Bennis, Clifton and Nelson, Heifetz, and Murray), sociologists and social workers (such as Block and Brown), philosophers and theologians (such as Greenleaf, Parks, and Miller), rhetoricians (such as Hart, Hackman and Johnson, Jamieson, and Northouse), educators (such as Bogue, Gardner, and Keohane), and natural scientists (such as Coles and Wheatley), to name just a few. This breadth of honors college leadership curricula demonstrates how the modern study of leadership provides connective tissue binding necessary theory and practice to enrich any disciplinary venture. In this vein, Nobel Peace Prize laureates provide a treasure trove of diverse exemplars to our current honors students of individuals and institutions willing to act during Emerson's times of terror.

Arguably, we find ourselves currently in a situation where such leadership examples and narratives are particularly important and needed. Fierce battles among and between such cultural phenomena as cancel culture, "woke" culture, a culture of fear, progressivist culture, ultra-conservative culture, and identity politics, to name just some of the labels being used, often derogatorily, have a huge impact on political and cultural communication. They sadly create a sense that peace, understanding, and reconciliation are all but impossible. Much of this is arguably fueled by modern social media, which tends to create echo chambers within which resentment and anger grow (Jamieson and Cappella 75–90).

In such times, many of the Nobel Peace Prize laureates—along with the idea underlying both the Peace Prize and the other Nobel Prizes—exist as exemplars of individuals and organizations who provide students a viable alternative to the aforementioned extremes. Laureates typically do not cancel those with whom they disagree, nor do they invest time in demonizing others. Laureates seek collaboration, use their power to build community and discern common ground, champion democracy, protect free speech, and celebrate the richness of diversity in all its forms. South African scholar and educator Nico de Klerk created an innovative program, *Be-A-Nelson*, to motivate young leaders to engage in building local communities. The program honors the legacy of one of the 1993 peace laureates, Nelson Mandela, an acclaimed visionary for peace (de Klerk 303). If honors faculty and administrators took up a call like Nico de Klerk's, challenging our honors students to *Be-A-Nobel-Peace-Prize-Laureate* and to

begin that journey as undergraduates, the outcomes of their efforts would bring further distinction to our programs and institutions.

WHY NCHC HOLDS INTEREST FOR NOBEL

Steeped in integrity and dedication to the charge they fulfill in executing Alfred Nobel's will, the Norwegian Nobel Institute's (NNI) mission involves supporting the Norwegian Nobel Committee (NNC) in the latter's annual selection and awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize. In addition, the NNI hosts Fulbright scholars and other visiting researchers in select spring semesters to conduct research surrounding peace, and it maintains an archival library dedicated to the legacy of Alfred Nobel and his prize.

In June 2015, 24 honors students, representing the 14 institutional members of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), were given time at the institute to meet with recently retired Director of the institute and Secretary of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Professor Geir Lundestad. Upon arrival, the PASSHE faculty group leader (and co-author of this paper), Dr. Kevin W. Dean, was informed that the meeting was highly irregular and that they were the first group of international students afforded this opportunity. Fortunately, the students were well prepared for the encounter, had practiced the questions they might ask, and represented honors students from the United States in the best way possible. Upon the group's departure, Professor Lundestad pulled Dean aside and said, "We don't do these sorts of events, but you can bring back your students anytime" (Dean, Personal). Thus, a *Partners in Peace* relationship between honors, and more specifically the honors college at West Chester University of Pennsylvania (WCU), where Dean taught, and Nobel began. An extensive discussion about the 2015 program and the role of one of WCU's international students to help facilitate the experience is found in an NCHC monograph (Dean, "Drawing on Gifts" 258–64).

Sustained dialogue between Dean and the NNI produced continued growth and development, understanding, and appreciation between the parties involved. Dr. Asle Toje, then the Research Director of the NNI (and current member and Vice Chair of the NNC), made introductions to the new and current NNI Director, Dr. Olav Njølstad, and several members of the NNC. Of monumental impact was the meeting of the authors in spring 2018. Committee member Dr. Henrik Syse, then recently named Vice Chair of the committee, accepted an invitation to visit WCU to meet

with students involved in the study of peace through the lens of Nobel and deliver a public lecture for the campus and local community. Those two days, packed with interaction, lit a spark of passion within both the honors and campus communities and equipped Syse with credible evidence he could share with his Norwegian colleagues, confirming the integrity and value that honors students and programs could provide in collaborative efforts with Nobel. In the ensuing years, the authors mused about expanding the *Partners in Peace* work at WCU to a larger student population of equal academic quality. NCHC quickly surfaced as the ideal location for potential program development. Consequently, associates of the NNI as well as of the Nobel Peace Center (NPC), the museum and public-dissemination arm of the Nobel Peace Prize, have, in collaboration with Dean and Syse, identified five qualities they find attractive in hosting *Partners in Peace* within the structure of NCHC.

First, NCHC provides permanence and stability. Unlike individual institutions, often dependent on the vision of the honors director and/or the institution's senior management, NCHC exists as a constant in the advocacy of honors education. While honors offerings at any given institution may ebb and flow, NCHC remains secure. Further, the proven achievement of hosting an annual conference provides a dependable platform for face-to-face dialogue surrounding common academic interests.

Second, NCHC offers change and growth by constantly serving new generations of learners and welcoming new faculty leadership into the honors community. The influx of new members, often coming from institutions that also embrace their alumni, increases possibilities for reaching ever-growing numbers of people while cementing traditions through collaborative efforts with alumni.

Third, NCHC celebrates and welcomes a multitude of diverse perspectives. Unlike discipline-specific professional organizations, NCHC exudes academic and intellectual diversity across a myriad of disciplines. Honors programs and colleges provide exceptional spaces to foster communities of academic learners from a wide swath of academic disciplinary interests. The potential for creating interdisciplinary teams of diverse individuals dedicated to collaborative efforts holds potential for robust outcomes. Our Norwegian colleagues expressed appreciation for the geographic and institutional diversity within honors. NCHC's engagement with institutions in every state, combined with its dedication to international membership and programming, enables NCHC to have truly global impact.

Fourth, unlike many higher education associations that serve a particular *type* of institution, NCHC has the reputation for serving academically motivated learners located in an unprecedently wide arena of locations and systems. Large to small, two- to four-year, private to public, liberal-arts focus to research-and-development (R1) focus, historical roots to a given demographic to international populations, NCHC serves and learns from all its members. Diversity is also reflected at NCHC, as has been the case with recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize within the past 50 years, with increased attention to issues of equity and inclusion and to celebration of those from marginalized populations.

Finally, NCHC merits attention from prestigious organizations such as those who advocate and maintain the ideals of Alfred Nobel, as NCHC members, faculty, administrators, staff, and students constitute a robust cohort of present and future leaders within the communities in which they reside. The Norwegian leadership associated with Nobel are keenly aware that a vast majority of peace laureates developed their advocacy and passion for peace in their late teens and early twenties. Planting seeds of possibilities within the minds of NCHC members could generate future peace activists and maybe even a future Peace Prize laureate.

The interest in greater possible interaction between Nobel and NCHC institutions has become magnified under the current leadership at the Nobel Peace Center (NPC). Located in a prominent facility situated on the Oslo fjord and in close walking distance to both the NNI and Oslo City Hall, where the Nobel Peace Prize is annually awarded, the NPC celebrates past laureates in its museum and provides visitors with books, cards, and memorabilia related to Alfred Nobel and the peace laureates. The NPC always had a mission of education, but under the direction of current Executive Director Kjersti Fløgstad, the NPC offers an even more proactive approach to education. Specifically, Fløgstad and her colleagues seek pathways to sharing the insights of Nobel and the peace laureates with those who may not physically visit the center.

MODELS OF NOBEL ENGAGEMENT IN HONORS

Collaborative work between the West Chester University Honors College and Norwegian Nobel leadership, begun in fall 2015, has resulted in the development of pedagogical models of engagement based on lessons gleaned from the study of Nobel Peace Prize laureates. The highly interactive

modules that have been developed enable honors students to enhance their theoretical and skill development as citizen leaders dedicated to promoting peace. These modules have evolved over time and represent extensive hours of dialogue, *inter alia*, between the authors of this article and were enriched through the participation of faculty and administrative colleagues at WCU as well as Norwegian individuals and entities linked to the Nobel Peace Prize and through the passionate energy and insight of honors student leaders. (We pay tribute to these individuals in our acknowledgement section.)

Nobel Honors Course

Our first model involves offering a special topics honors course in the fall semester, focusing on the study of Alfred Nobel and the strategies employed by various Nobel Peace Prize laureates in their efforts to promote peace. (For a copy of the syllabus, please contact the authors.) This course was first offered in fall 2017 and was led by Dean through the fall of 2022. The following reflects the running of the program up until late 2022 (when Dean retired from the program). While the logistical elements have varied and over the years ideally improved, four student outcomes have remained constant: 1) students conduct independent research and write a paper focusing on a previous Nobel Peace Prize laureate; 2) upon the announcement of the year's recipient, in early October, students reflect on the life, work, and impact of the year's announced prize recipient; 3) students create and present an interactive workshop to students outside of the class, focusing on a leadership strategy the laureate utilized in his, her, or their work, which could become a useful skill for audience members to incorporate in their own contexts of leadership and promoting social change; and 4) students engage in critical thinking and reasoning needed to personally nominate and then collaboratively select a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize for the year that just ended, the actual nomination being made by a professor in the history department (for persons and institutions who may nominate, see nobelprize.org/nomination/peace).

When we first offered the course at WCU, it ran twice per week for two 90-minute sessions. Students began by reading accounts of the life and vision of Alfred Nobel, his will, the establishment of the Nobel Peace Prize, and the multiple logistical elements surrounding both the nomination and selection process. By the second week of class, students were divided into three groups and each group was assigned a past laureate, whom students collaboratively explored as a case study. Students researched the

laureate's formative background, the cause the laureate championed, and their motivation for doing so. Students then identified and researched two leadership skills the laureate employed (or employs) in their work, which could be applied to contexts where current students find themselves engaged in social change. Next, students undertook a rhetorical analysis of the Nobel Lecture given by the laureate (or a representative of the laureate) upon the acceptance of the prize on December 10. Finally, students investigated any aspect of subsequent movements toward peace that can be attributed to the awarding of the prize.

After sharing the collaborative projects, students selected a laureate of personal interest and undertook the same investigative and critical analysis process. The final project resulted in an approximately 15-page paper with a bibliography comprising a minimum of ten sources. In addition to the paper, students identified one leadership quality unique to their laureate and developed an interactive exercise to illustrate the concept. During the final weeks of the term, the professor coordinated closely with the Director of Student Involvement and Leadership Programs, under the school's Division of Student Affairs, to create one-hour time blocks where students would present their findings, each teaching a 20-minute lesson about their laureate and the laureate's use of leadership to champion their cause. Each student employed the exercise they developed for a group of students not enrolled in the class. Each student presenter was responsible for recruiting five people to come to their session and each session was widely advertised through Student Affairs. Attendance records were kept for each session, and attendees completed and submitted evaluations.

As the course evolved, we discovered that the out-of-class sessions proved logistically challenging based on the need for required space and time blocks that would sometimes conflict with student schedules. While the partnership with Student Affairs was meaningful, they were not able to complete the follow-through in advertising, and, despite the requirement for presenters to help generate an audience, attendance often proved disappointing. We remedied this situation in 2018, moving the course to a three-hour block evening slot, Wednesday nights from 7 to 10 p.m. We chose this time for access to desirable space and because it provided fewer schedule conflicts from both required major classes and heavily populated co-curricular activities that could hinder student interest. Starting at the end of October, we ran student workshop presentations for six weeks from 7:30 until 9:00 p.m., which allowed 30 minutes for pre-event set-up and an hour for debriefing and planning for the next week's presentations.

During the first four weeks of the semester, we actively promoted the newly formed *Nobel Leadership Series*, specially targeting our entering first-year students. We focused on this population for three reasons. First, it helped build community in a co-curricular setting for entering students who typically seek places to affiliate. Second, and most important, we wanted students who enroll in the course to have a passion for Nobel as well as some foundational knowledge of the Nobel Peace Prize. We began a most successful venture of making participation in the N*obel Leadership Series* a prerequisite for registering for the course. Doing so increased the dedication students showed with their engagement, and the overall quality of the projects increased as students had a sense of what they might strive to achieve based on prior experience. Finally, as an incentive for attending all six nights of the event, students received official certification and public recognition for completing the series. Formal recognition gave students an academic credential for their CV. This reinforced our programmatic attempts, which started during summer orientation, to urge students to engage in meaningful experiences that can make them competitive for internships, scholarships, and other recognition. We literally had students apply to join the *Nobel Leadership Series*; that simple act added a sense of importance to the event. Attendance at these workshops was rarely an issue, and it was most impressive to see the level of engagement students displayed. We began by offering 40 seats, and by 2020 we hosted 60. The *Nobel Leadership Series* proved an oasis for students during the virtual period of COVID. Many participants reported that coming together online those Wednesday nights was a highlight of the week.

Also, beginning in 2018, we required students registered for the course to select a laureate for their primary research project who had not been covered by student presenters in previous years. While some students initially found this restriction disappointing because personal favorites were not available to them, students soon showed great interest and eagerness to enlighten their peers about a laureate who did not have the name recognition or popularity of a Martin Luther King, Jr., Jimmy Carter, Mother Teresa, or Nelson Mandela. Indeed, some of the most impactful reports and projects centered on laureates without political title, fortune, or fame. Students marveled at ordinary individuals from humble circumstances who demonstrated extraordinary abilities because they cared to engage. Having students identify laureates not previously studied also created a valuable and growing repository of exemplar leaders for future study.

In addition to the group and individual research projects, each member of the class independently researched and submitted two separate candidates who could contend for the prize in the following year. Technically, the Nobel Peace Prize is a year behind. For example, the deadline for nominations for the 2023 prize was February 1, 2023. Thus, a successful nominee should have amassed quality work within the prior year of the award to merit consideration. Nominations must include how the nominee embodies the parameters of Nobel's will. Students also need support from external sources to bolster their claims. Students submitted the first nomination by late October and the second by the week prior to Thanksgiving. During the class session before Thanksgiving break, students received the list of nominations and voted for their top three choices. The names were then announced via email, and students came to the class immediately following the Thanksgiving break with a paragraph position statement of who best, in their view, merited the nomination. The class functioned much as the five members of the actual Norwegian Nobel Committee (NNC). Final deliberations promoted the qualities of a preferred candidate and offered justification for why that candidate merited the nomination above others.

With the establishment of the *Nobel Leadership Series*, which provides a dependable and engaged audience, students who attended the workshops received the opportunity to also make a nomination. Additionally, we empowered that cohort of students with the task of narrowing the nomination field, often including some 30 entries, down to three candidates. The deliberations to reach a final name for nomination became exclusive to the students registered for the class, and like the deliberations of the actual NNC, their deliberations remain confidential. This revised format, building student ownership in the program, dramatically heightened student excitement for the final night of class celebration.

In collaboration with the Division of Student Affairs, we held our celebration in a large lecture hall and invited student leaders and honors faculty to the event. We encouraged all student participants to dress formally for the celebration event as the evening concluded with a group photo. We invited students who successfully completed the *Nobel Leadership Series* to the front of the lecture hall and presented them with a certificate, pin, and a ten-inch Norwegian flag. We then called students in the class who created the presentations forward for recognition as *Nobel Scholars*, each one also receiving a certificate, pin, and Norwegian flag. The most senior members of the class then revealed the candidate students chose as the nominee. Just as

the chair of the NNC reads a justification statement providing the rationale for the committee's choice to receive the prize, the student leaders created a brief PowerPoint presentation for the assembled audience to introduce the nominee. We concluded the evening with a group photo and enjoyed a sheet cake decorated with a likeness of the Nobel Medallion that the actual laureates receive.

During each of the Nobel Leadership Series programs, we administered pre- and post-program surveys to student participants to evaluate their knowledge of Alfred Nobel and the Nobel Peace Prize. Results, between 2017 and 2021, for four questions are listed below.

Q: Without Googling, name 5 past winners that have received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Year	Participants	Pre -% correct responses	Post - % correct responses
2021	41	9.7%	73.7%
2020	52	5.7%	90.1%
2019	42	0%	90.6%
2018	36	44.4%	90.6%
2017	31	3.2%	80.6%

Q: How do you think someone can be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize?

Year	Participants	Pre -% correct responses	Post - % correct responses
2021	41	17.0%	60.5%
2020	52	11.5%	80.7%
2019	42	11.9%	78.1%
2018	36	22.2%	62.5%
2017	31	9.6%	54.8%

Q: What makes someone eligible to win the Nobel Peace Prize?

Year	Participants	Pre -% correct responses	Post - % correct responses
2021	41	19.5%	78.9%
2020	52	19.2%	80.7%
2019	42	16.7%	97.%
2018	36	19.4%	81.3%
2017	31	22.5%	64.5%

Q: What was Alfred Nobel known for?

Year	Participants	Pre -% correct responses	Post - % correct responses
2021	41	36.60%	89.5%
2020	52	32.60%	94.2%
2019	42	11.9%	96.8%
2018	36	52.7%	100%
2017	31	19.3%	80.6%

The data in these tables show a dramatic shift in content understanding between the start of the program, typically late October, and its conclusion in early December. True, retaining information for six weeks should not seem unusual for honors students. However, given the reality that students engaged in the *Nobel Leadership Series* typically carry 18 credits, engage in co-curricular activities, and often hold part-time jobs, the retention of content they were exposed to without any formal expectation merits commendation. The data also reflect some increase in initial awareness of Nobel and related subject material as the years progress. We surmise that the increase in student pre-knowledge about Nobel from the first year of the program stems in part from our honors college and honors student association's embrace of curricular and co-curricular programming highlighting the legacy of Alfred Nobel as evidenced in our print and social media channels available to the larger community, including our incoming

student population. Indeed, self-reports from incoming students indicate that the ability to participate in the Nobel program has factored into their acceptance decision for both the university and our honors college.

Although the results reported for the 2021 cohort show a decline in content retention, that fall was our first time back on campus full time following three missed in-person semesters due to COVID. Our university mandated a 24/7 full mask policy for all university activities, both academic and residential. In short, added stress filled the semester. To our astonishment, several students reported the Wednesday nights as a high point of their weeks because they had the ability to form into small groups for guided dialogue with upper-class student peer leaders.

Nobel Forum

The second model, a *Nobel Forum*, directs participants to focus on the most recent Nobel Peace Laureate and embraces the motto *think globally—act locally.* The logistics for the spring 2023 forum highlighted an event that lasted from early Friday through Saturday afternoon in late March. The culmination of the event involved dedicated time, on a late Saturday afternoon, for public presentations by teams of students, outlining three substantive projects they aimed to execute and assess in the following academic year. Each project was designed to enact, on the campus or within the local community, the local spirit of the year's Nobel Peace Prize laureates' global work.

Let us offer some elaboration of the planning and activities involved in this signature event as an inspiration to others who might want to try out a similar format.

Event coordination for the *Nobel Forum* would typically fall to the honors director supported by a leadership team. Team membership can certainly vary depending on institutional needs but must include students holding visible roles. Student leadership involvement in this event is critical; peers motivate peers to engage, and thus current undergraduates with a record of passion for Nobel should occupy at least two seats. Other appropriate members can include honors alumni who actively engaged as undergraduate students in Nobel-related programming. A faculty member in honors makes another solid choice as does a university staff member from the provost's office, student affairs, alumni relations, and/or the institution's public relations department. WCU was particularly fortunate in spring 2023 to have Syse on campus as a visiting scholar; he served on the leadership

team for the event and helped organize lectures and events during the two days that the forum lasted.

Planning for a spring *Nobel Forum* ideally begins in the fall, following the public broadcast announcement of the year's recipient. Tradition dictates that the Chair of the NNC reveals the winner on the first Friday of the first full week in October. With the new laureate known, all first-, second-, and third-year honors students receive an email invitation to apply for consideration as a *Nobel Forum* participant. For our event, we intentionally excluded students graduating in the spring; those students selected for participation in the forum pledge their availability for collaborative work that runs through the middle of the following fall term. An honors faculty member and representative from the provost's office rounded out the planning team.

Beyond asking applicants to affirm their time availability and pledge to prioritize full attendance at the spring's *Nobel Forum*, students submit their CVs, provide current and/or past involvement with Nobel-related programs, and explain why they want to participate in the *Nobel Forum*. Additionally, they must submit a one-page proposal for a project they would envision for making the global recognition, given by the Peace Prize, a reality locally. The leadership committee reviews all applications and, ideally, by the week following the Thanksgiving holiday (although this was done during the early spring semester in 2023), announces the slate of those students invited to present at the forum. Decisions are made by the leadership committee based on the students' applications. For our event, we had 15 students placed into small task groups of five per group. That proved an effective group size, although selection may, of course, also be done differently. Several personal attributes—including but not limited to diversity of major, class standing, gender, race, and ethnicity—should factor into group composition. In general, the more diverse the student groups, the greater opportunities for innovation and creativity.

The next step of the process involves providing space and guidance for the groups to meet and determine the direction their project might take. There are many ways in which such preparation for a *Nobel Forum* can be envisioned. One idea involves inviting participants from all the groups to meet officially for the first time at an orientation session during the first week of December, where they participate in community-building exercises and share their individual proposals among their peer group. Participants should draw on the work of communication scholar Lloyd Bitzer, who emphasizes the importance of context in any rhetorical situation by noting that "rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to situation,

in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question" (6). Bitzer underscores for students the importance of their selection of a desired location for a project, e.g., campus, community, or joint campus and community, to name a few options. At the orientation event, participants should consider and eventually articulate how the project they envision, on a local level, reflects the celebrated laureate's work. During the presentations at that event, everyone should listen, think, and reflect on common threads among the presentations as they will ultimately have the task of articulating a single group project.

During the winter break, the leadership team can take the ideas generated by the individual groups and begin to brainstorm names of campus faculty, campus administrators, local citizen leaders, and alumni who may have special interest in and/or knowledge about the topic that inspired the new laureate. These individuals should be invited as mentors/consultants during the actual *Nobel Forum*. A critical task involves assigning a recording secretary to each group to ensure the groups' dialogues exist for future reflection and study. Honors student leaders who will graduate in May and are thus precluded from participant membership in the *Nobel Forum* make ideal candidates for the position of recording secretary.

The spring 2023 WCU *Nobel Forum* ran from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. on Friday and from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. on Saturday. Friday began with the introduction of external mentors to the full number assembled. Later, students engaged in several lectures and discussions relevant to the Nobel Peace Prize, followed by a large public event in the evening. Students spent Saturday working within their groups, developing final versions of their projects, which were then presented in public for an audience consisting of faculty, students, and family members. Additionally, student presenters were expected to articulate how their project linked to the theme addressed by the current Nobel Peace Laurate and why their chosen context to implement the project was appropriate for the actualization of their goal.

After the *Nobel Forum*, the student groups have the remainder of the spring semester, the summer, and the early fall semester through September to enact their projects. Each group must prepare and present a report to the honors director. Ideally, the report should arrive by the second week of April. As an illustration, we offer a summary of the projects that were presented at the 2023 WCU *Nobel Forum*, based on the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize.

Three entities shared the 2022 prize: Ales Bialiatski from Belarus, Memorial from Russia, and the Center for Civil Liberties from the Ukraine.

The NNC provided the following rationale for their choice, "The Peace Prize laureates represent civil society in their home countries. They have for many years promoted the right to criticize power and protect the fundamental rights of citizens. They have made an outstanding effort to document war crimes, human rights abuses and the abuse of power. Together they demonstrate the significance of civil society for peace and democracy" (nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2022/summary). Geographic context is paramount in analyzing the deeper meaning of this award. Put simply, the regions represented are embroiled in war, yet, while hostilities exist among these regional neighbors, Bialiatski and the two organizations strive amid strife to hold those who thwart peace accountable for their actions, learn from their past, and seek a future of collaboration rather than contention among neighbors.

The three student groups applied the theme of the 2022 prize in three local contexts. One group, emulating Bialiatski, explored the competitive tensions and lack of open communication between various co-curricular student organizations on campus, noting ire that arose between groups over the topic of fundraising. Why, asked the group, do we need to host multiple 10K races, hosted by individual organizations that then bicker over finding non-conflicting time and space for the events and over gaining support from community partners who do not desire to sponsor multiple similar events? Their proposal created space for dialog between organizations who expressed interest in similar fundraising initiatives with the goal of creating collaborative partnerships where a 10K could be multi-hosted by several organizations who would then equitably split the raised funds.

A second group—inspired by Ukraine's Center for Civil Liberties, which seeks strategies that bring together individuals who see themselves and their neighbors as incompatible—were interested in the town-and-gown tension between the university and the borough that buttresses the campus. The group specifically targeted the issue of rental housing and proposed a task force comprising community landlords and leaders of co-curricular student organizations. After preliminary research, including focus group testing, the group learned how students need off-campus housing options that are affordable, safe, and in good condition and how landlords desire sustained financial support from students. The proposal involved establishing a community conversation between a group of local landlords and college student leaders. Specifically, the students pitched the notion of students from a specific organization, say, members of the speech and debate national honor society, *Pi Kappa Delta* (PKD), agreeing to provide a steady and predictable stream of PKD members to fill space in a given house. In return for

knowing they were getting responsible tenants, landlords would incentivize the space through a combination of decreased monthly rent and enhanced maintenance.

The final group elected to focus on how members of the institution share stories about themselves, specifically when it comes to issues of race. During the research phase, our students were stunned to learn that while our institution was among the first to admit Black students, it denied those very students access to reside in campus housing. Forcing students of color to commute marginalized and excluded this population from the opportunities to participate in the on-campus community afforded their peers. The student project, akin to Memorial, involved recovering accounts of such injustices based on race through small group discourse with alumni of color, asking questions such as how they perceive they were treated based on race and what perceptions of the university they hold today as they look back to their time at the institution. When completed, students will present their collection of ethnographic interviews to the university archives.

The two models we have delineated, one curricular and the second co-curricular, have yielded highly positive results as evidenced by the engagement of students, the university administration, and members of the community. Witnessing nearly 500 students over the past seven years dedicate their time to the exploration of peace and reading the in-depth analyses students have generated in teasing out qualities of leadership that proved successful in trying circumstances and that they then employed in their own lives have demonstrated for us the value of such high-impact practices. As students deliver, with persuasive eloquence, their case for who merits the recognition of being named a Nobel Peace Laureate, the students, who all too often become isolated in the cocoon of college life, become transformed into global citizens.

NEXT STEPS BETWEEN HONORS AND NOBEL

Beyond the models delineated above, several other ideas are currently being brainstormed, with a view to identifying additional models that honors programs can implement on their local institutional and/or community levels. A conversation between the authors and NPC's Education Director, occurring in October 2023, envisions possible collaborative efforts between honors and the NPC to broaden an initiative we tentatively call *Nobel Monday*.

The announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize always occurs on the Friday of the first full week in October. In 2021, the NPC inaugurated a program designed to equip high and middle school teachers with background data related to the newly named laureate(s) and the cause championed that resulted in their receiving the prize. Additionally, the NPC staff has created age-appropriate questions designed to generate group discussion related to the laureate(s) and possible application of the prize's theme on the local level. Researchers at the NPC work feverously from the moment of the announcement, 11:00 a.m. Oslo time on Friday, through noon the following Sunday, when they post materials gathered and generated on the NPC website for educators to access. Providing teachers with these resources enables them to quickly assemble a meaningful class presentation on Monday. Celebrating *Nobel Monday* capitalizes on the immediacy of the Friday laureate announcement and ideally fosters greater global dialogue. Each year, the information gathering process gains refinement, but a challenge remains. While technology exists for the NPC leadership to identify the number of individuals who access materials on their website, they lack an ability to discern impact gained from use of the content.

A potential partnership opportunity exists where honors students could collaborate with teachers at middle and high schools, encouraging and assisting them to embrace the content from the NPC website, incorporate it into a class or co-curricular gathering on Monday, and then report feedback. The feedback would, ideally, include responses from teacher and student participants concerning the value of the content in fostering a greater understanding of the named laureate, the cause championed, and potential implementation of strategies for peace within the local community. Honors students would then collect their findings and submit a summary report from each institution to the NPC. The NPC could then post results on their website and use the feedback in refining their processes. Collaborative projects between the NCHC and the NPC represent an evolving process. *Nobel Monday* illustrates just one example of new and innovative practices to consider.

At the time of writing, we continue our work to spread this idea and these initiatives to other honors programs. In May 2023, NNI Director Olav Njølstad hosted a meeting in Oslo, Norway, that included the authors, NPC Director Kjersti Fløgstad, and Bendik B. Egge, the Education Director for the NPC. The authors shared achievements from the recent Nobel educational

programs at WCU and plans for the Nobel-related programming at the national conference of NCHC in November. From that meeting and subsequent follow-up conversations, the authors have received overt support for continued dialogue leading toward a recognized relationship between the NPC and NCHC.

Following the November 2023 NCHC plenary address delivered by Syse and the subsequent workshop facilitated by the authors, attendees received a QR code and an invitation to download the code on their cell phones. Accepting this invitation enabled participants to share their interest in further involvement and to consider adding the topics of Alfred Nobel and Nobel Peace Prize laureates into the curricular and co-curricular lives of honors students within their institutions. We are thrilled with the interest expressed by many of the delegates. That Saturday, we received 153 responses, 95.4% expressing a high desire for further opportunities. Those affirming responses come from 96 different institutions representing the wide diversity that constitutes NCHC membership: large and small, public and private, national and international, two- and four-year institutions. Seventy-one percent of the positive feedback came from administrators/faculty, which indicates the potential for institutional commitment. Additionally, we received verbal affirmation from attendees of the International Welcome Reception, the International Education business meeting, the International Forum, and throughout the conference in hallway conversation.

The authors shared this data with NCHC President Eddie Weller, and on April 29, 2024, NCHC received a signed MOU from the NPC in support of a multi-year commitment of collaborative efforts in the promotion and recognition of leadership skill development for the purpose of promoting peace. We look forward to future active dialogue with NCHC leadership about the promotion of peace by honors students and institutional members. While further information will be forthcoming, we can confirm that NCHC 2024 in Kansas City will feature a special extended workshop during the conference, built on the one facilitated by the authors in Chicago, to provide creative space to help interested faculty and students craft Nobel- and peace-related curricula and projects. Jørgen Frydnes, Chair of the Norway Nobel Committee, will provide leadership in that event. Additionally, in 2025, the NCHC International Education Committee will inaugurate a poster session dedicated to research and practice in international contexts that promote peace. This marks an exciting time for expanding NCHC's reach both nationally and internationally in a cause that supersedes so many polarizing issues that continue to divide us. As honors educators continually

strive to advance leadership among honors students, the synergistic collaborations we have presented hold the potential to advance organizational leadership for NCHC.

CONCLUSION

It was not lost on anyone attending the 2023 NCHC annual conference in Chicago that Hamas had shortly before savagely launched an attack on innocent Israeli citizens, who had previously felt safe within their geographic boarders. In the days that have since passed, we can only watch in horror the catastrophic carnage suffered in retribution by the residents of Gaza. Our news stations, representing philosophies from both the right and left of our nation's political spectrum, have given air time to the spill-over of conflict, often leading to hostilities on many of our campuses. *Partners in Peace* represents action that is more than just "nice" at such a time of conflict: it is critical. If we as leaders in higher education ignore our duty to teach and practice democracy and find opportunities to promote peace, we suffer the sentiment of Dante's—or Kennedy's—condemnation.

Fortunately, in despair, peace provides hope. We close, therefore, with the final portion of Henrik Syse's 2023 NCHC plenary address, a story about Apollo 8 and the very first manned mission to the moon in 1968. Those who lived in 1968, as well as those who study that period of history, know that it was far from a time of harmony. The Vietnam War raged, violent protests poured onto streets and permeated campuses in the U.S. and around the world, Czechoslovakia had been invaded by the Soviet Union, and the lives of two young fathers with visions of peace, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy, were cut short by assassins' bullets. In the words of balladeer Billy Joel, while "We didn't start the fire / It was always burning" (Joel). Yet during so much pain and grief came a message of hope for humanity that was viewed globally by more people at one moment than had ever happened before. The message was born from the crucible of the cold war, a time when the United States and the Soviet Union found little in common and were engaged in numerous political competitions, including a fierce space race. Yet, from the recesses of space, a message of peace was resoundingly heard as human beings for the first time ever had left Earth to travel to another celestial body. As the astronauts of Apollo 8 entered moon orbit on Christmas Eve of 1968, in preparation for what would the next year become the first-ever landing on the moon, they conveyed to the whole world a hope for peace and understanding as they read from the first chapter of the Book of

Genesis, with its famous evocation of "the good earth" (NASA). The broadcast made an enormous impression and arguably had an impact on how the space race developed. In the years that followed, space was gradually carved out as a realm of peaceful collaboration among the superpowers, resulting in the remarkable Apollo-Soyuz project in 1975 and later in the International Space Station. Syse's point was to highlight how the unique vantage point of space provided a perspective that emphasized the strange insignificance of our conflicts on earth as compared to what unites us on this small, wondrous planet—the good earth.

Our time urgently needs a similar push toward peace and similar visions of areas of collaboration, exploration, and mutual understanding. We believe that the ideals of the Nobel Peace Prize—and the other Nobel Prizes—can be of help in creating such a push among students, the leaders of tomorrow, and that honors programs and the NCHC can be an ideal arena for exactly that progress.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to pay specific thanks to the following individuals whose contributions made our collaboration possible.

First, Carl Korsnes, WCU alumni class of 2014, a Norwegian student who studied for three years at our institution and taught us all much about Norway.

Second, WCU faculty and administration, specifically emeritus WCU history professor Charles Hardy III; former Director of Student Involvement and Leadership Programs within the Division of Student Affairs, Charlie Warner; Interim Provost Jeffery L. Osgood; retired President Greg Weisenstein, who offered the institutional support needed to make the 2015 program possible, and Immediate Past President Christopher Fiorentino.

Third, our Norwegian partners from the following organizations: late Director Geir Lundestad and current Director Olav Njølstad of the Norwegian Nobel Institute; Berit Reiss-Andersen, Asle Toje, and Jørgen W. Frydnes of the Norwegian Nobel Committee; and Kjersti Fløgstad, Bendik B. Egge, and Helena Boyden Lamb of the Nobel Peace Center.

Fourth, the nearly 500 WCU honors student leaders who engaged in the Nobel Leadership Series and/or the Nobel Forum and specifically those extremely dedicated, faithful individuals who championed the Nobel partnership: Michael B. Moriarty, Matthew Leinhauser, Hannah Laboski Leinhauser, Olwen DeSarno, John McSweeney, Joseph McSweeney, Julia Edwards, Dunya Markovic, Michael Nangle, and Lauren Kozicki.

Fifth, Dr. Eddie Weller, NCHC President 2023–2024, and the leadership of NCHC.

Sixth, Dr. Jeff Portnoy, General Editor of the NCHC Monograph Series, who initially envisioned the name *Partners in Peace*.

Finally, Dr. Ada Long, Founding Editor of *JNCHC* and *HIP*, who corresponded with us, extending optimism and encouragement throughout the process, literally, until the end. May any future work that springs from this effort be a further contribution to her legacy.

ENDNOTES

[1]A fine discussion of the origins of this quotation—at best an inaccurate paraphrase of Dante—can be found at quoteinvestigator.com/2015/01/14/hottest. See also https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/life-of-john-f-kennedy/fast-facts-john-f-kennedy/john-f-kennedys-favorite-quotations-dantes-inferno. Pages accessed 29 Dec. 2023.

[2]It is not 100% clear why Nobel chose to have a Norwegian committee award the Peace Prize. At the time of Nobel's final will and passing, Norway and Sweden were in a political union, and Norway had no independent foreign policy. That may have been Nobel's reason for the choice of Norway: he wanted to ensure that the most political of the prizes would be handed out in a politically more neutral, less powerful, and less controversial location. When the union was peacefully dissolved in 1905, and Norway became an independent nation, the Peace Prize continued to be awarded by the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

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