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The Evolution of An Interdisciplinary Peace Studies Centre: The Bradford Experience

Paul Rogers

Over the past thirty years, peace studies centres have tended to develop according to four possible models. A common experience has been a small group of academics, often in a single traditional department, getting together to develop courses and bringing in other interested staff in the process. There may only be two or three core staff holding the centre together, with them depending heavily on the goodwill of many others. Teaching will be mainly at undergraduate level and a combination of student enthusiasm and staff commitment may produce a very successful centre.

A second approach involves the establishment of a small free-standing centre dedicated specifically to peace studies, often as a result of an endowment, but again relying heavily on other faculty. This may be primarily a teaching centre or else concentrate on research with some graduate work. A third approach, perhaps more common in Europe, is the setting up of a dedicated research unit or centre, often independent of universities. While able to engage in substantial research activities, such a centre can be vulnerable to funding crises.

Finally, there is the relatively rare development of an integrated university department of peace studies with a substantial number of staff drawn from numerous disciplines but operating largely as a free-standing centre, broadly similar in organisation to a traditional department but focussed on the study of peace.

Each model has strengths and weaknesses, and this article discusses one particular experience at Bradford University in England, where a peace studies centre developed initially according to the second approach but eventually evolved into a substantial independent department.

The Department of Peace Studies at Bradford University in England was established 22 years ago and has grown to be the largest university centre for peace studies in the world. Its origins and development both owe much to public interest in issues of peace and war in the early 1970s, when members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) sought to encourage the creation of a peace studies department in a British university, along the lines of several successful centres in Scandinavia and North America.

The Bradford Experience

Bradford is an industrial city of about 350,000 people, 200 miles north of London in Yorkshire. As a traditional textile city it has experienced numerous waves of inward migration and its population includes communities of Irish, Polish, Ukrainian, German, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Afro-Caribbean origin. The University was established in the 1960s as a technological university based on a well-developed college of technology and was keen to complement its science and technology orientation with an expansion in the applied social sciences.

It therefore responded favourably to the idea of a peace studies centre, a successful public appeal provided initial funding, a small MA programme commenced in 1974, a larger BA programme in 1975, and within a few years the Department had 80 students, almost all of them on the BA programme.

The department was initially seen as comprising a core of around six staff but drawing on the work of staff from other departments, and concentrating initially on its substantial teaching programme. From the start, its main commitment was to offering complete full-time peace studies degrees rather than concentrating on majors and minors for other programmes. During the 1980s though, and in the face of a national political climate which was strongly antagonistic to peace studies, the department sought to balance its substantial teaching programme with increased numbers of masters students and the development of a doctoral programme.

Over past 15 years, the Department has

balanced a large undergraduate programme, now of nearly 200 full-time students, with the development of a substantial graduate school. Two MA programmes, in *Peace Studies* and *International Politics and Security Studies*, now attract up to 40 students a year, and there is a large doctoral programme of around 50 research students, the majority of them full-time. About half of the graduate and research students are from overseas, including several from the United States and Canada and an increasing number from Japan.

Staff currently number around 30, with 19 lecturing staff, three research fellows, an administrator, development officer and support staff. Five staff are supported entirely by external research income drawn mainly from the Rowntree and Cadbury Trusts, the UK Economic and Social Research Council, the European Union and the Ford Foundation. While teaching is the main activity, all lecturing staff are active researchers, and they combine with the full-time PhD students to give a community of over 50 researchers with its own substantial in-house publishing programme including the *Peace Studies Papers* and *Peace Research Reports* series.

Research is focussed primarily on three main areas, conflict resolution, social change and international security. The Centre for Conflict Resolution, which is a research unit within the Department, combines theoretical studies in peacekeeping, mediation and conflict resolution with a range of practical programmes, many of them concerned with

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training mediators in areas in conflict. Staff have worked recently in former-Yugoslavia, Cyprus, Sri Lanka and Uganda, they have collaborated in mediation training for diplomats in Eastern Europe and South East Asia, and maintain links with centres in South Africa, Canada and Australia.

The Department's work in peace and social change involves a range of programmes in Latin America and Africa, including Jamaica, Namibia and Mozambique, and also South Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Many concentrate on the effects of conflict on development. Others are concerned with the idea of civil society and the process of nonviolent social change, the latter including links with Gandhian scholars in India. Research concerning problems in industrial societies includes work on ethnic relations and gender and politics.

The third major area of concern is with international security. This includes research programmes in the control of conventional arms transfers, nuclear and biological weapons control and the development of international regimes to promote environmental security. There is a particular interest in North/South relations and a concern that a new axis of global confrontation could develop after the Cold War. Primary determinants of international peace and security are now seen to be the deep global socio-economic divisions, environmental constraints on human development, and the legacy of militarisation left by the Cold War. Genuine human security in this context is therefore seen to

embrace issues of economic cooperation, sustainable development and environmental management as well as the control of militarisation.

Staff are drawn from political science, sociology, psychology, economics, international relations, history and philosophy, and also include biologists, a physicist and a chemist by original training.

The department has a high profile, with considerable media involvement, and frequently attracts criticism for independent analyses of political issues. While good relations are maintained with other departments in the university, the staff tend to work together primarily within the department, combining both to teach courses and to publish.

Peace Studies at Bradford has had an eventful history, and the department has witnessed many of the stresses, problems and arguments frequently found in peace studies centres. Its early years involved substantial attempts to develop evolutionary curricula with minimal assessment, which conflicted with university norms, and it also experienced, in those years, a period of often bitter factionalism among staff and students.

In its second decade, the department became rather more conventionally academic in terms of assessment processes and curricula, but this co-incided with the intense anti-nuclear campaigning of the early 1980s, a polarisation of the defence debate and a government highly antagonistic to the idea of peace studies. During this time, much

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of the independent research on alternative defence in Britain was undertaken in the department, and it was, as a result, bitterly and persistently criticised by the New Right, as well as being subject to near-continual government and media pressure.

This period, in retrospect though, was of great value to the department through two effects. The first was that it became an obvious centre for independent critical research and attracted some very able young scholars, particularly research students, some of whom later joined the faculty. Secondly, the constant exposure to criticism meant that published research had to be of a particularly high standard, and this has, with time, given staff and students a certain resilience and confidence in their work and a willingness to engage in vigorous debate with colleagues in more traditional disciplines.

By the late 1980s, and with the ending of the Cold War, most conventional international studies centres were floundering, largely as a result of ethnocentric intellectual rigidity. By contrast, the longer-term concern of peace research with North-South issues and intrasocietal relations stood the department in good stead, and gave it a flexibility in adapting to the changing global context.

Even so, all the usual problems of peace studies remain. Students are typically more demanding than most, and on occasions their needs may be more for a therapeutic community than a university department. Students differ greatly in their beliefs and

aspirations, and these differences lead to tensions virtually every year. Staff are frequently and heavily involved in support of a range of nongovernmental and campaigning groups as well as servicing the media, yet the department is in no way funded to allow time for such work. Stress levels are high.

In relation to research funding, the areas in which peace research is concentrated, especially international studies, are areas dominated by relatively conservative academic outlooks, so that more radical interdisciplinary departments have difficulties obtaining research and other grant aid. While Britain's few Quaker Trusts have been supportive, their resources are limited, and a disproportionate amount of time is devoted to fund-raising.

Building a committed intellectual community is a continual process, undertaken largely through an extensive programme of research seminars, but the department also relies heavily on frequent routine meetings of all staff and of staff/student groups. While the demands are considerable, the level of commitment is remarkable, and a leavening of humour is a frequent aid to tolerance.