

The University of Maine

**DigitalCommons@UMaine**

---

General University of Maine Publications

University of Maine Publications

---

6-2016

## News from the Wilson Center

The Wilson Center

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ\\_publications](https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications)



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

---

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in General University of Maine Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact [um.library.technical.services@maine.edu](mailto:um.library.technical.services@maine.edu).



# News from the Wilson Center



## A Multifaith Mission - Building Tables Not Walls

June 2016

Dear Friends,

We've been hearing a lot about walls this election season - about building longer, stronger and bigger walls to keep some people in and some people out. It's a message of exclusion and privilege, of isolation and uniformity, and it would have made the founders of the MCA cry.



Luckily, at the Wilson Center, we've spent our year doing just the opposite! Working together across lines of faith, culture, religion and tradition, we've become a different sort of construction crew. Our

mission? To identify walls, tip them on their side and turn them into tables – longer, stronger, and bigger tables – to make space for all the people we want to know and all the conversations we want to have.

Sometimes these table-building efforts have been quite literal. As attendance at our Wed night dinners, "Come to the Table"



dialogues, and Interfaith Luncheons has continued to grow, we have literally had to extend our seating, until the tables now stretch from one end of the building to the other. Remember those extra table-leaves your grandmother got out for Thanksgiving? Or the saw horses and boards she hid under a table-cloth? Just picture those on a larger scale! Sometimes the expansion has been more metaphorical, as with the Board's vote last fall to add the word "multifaith" to our mission statement or with the new signage installed in the front of our building (see photo above).

As programs expand and diversity grows, I am reminded of two things: 1) how lucky we are to have such articulate and dedicated students leading the way and 2) how blessed we are to have such deep roots of peace, compassion and multifaith collaboration at the our very heart of our organization. Some of you will remember the 1940s when UMaine Hillel (the Jewish student group) and the Newman



Club (the Catholic student group) were both a part of the MCA. More of you will remember the 1950s when Dorothy Clarke and Rev. Elwin Wilson wrote so eloquently about religious diversity, oneness, and spiritual unity. Even more of you will remember Elizabeth Morris’ inclusive preaching-style of the 1990s. In a world where divisiveness and hate-speech are on the rise, we are the inheritors of a rich and healing multifaith legacy.

It is a legacy which seems to resonate deeply with present-day students. In the last year alone, more than 1,700 people have attended events at the Wilson Center and another 1,300 have attended events which we co-sponsored or helped to facilitate elsewhere on campus. Students from nearly every faith tradition – Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Unitarian Universalist, Agnostic, Atheist, Earth-Centered, Buddhist, Hindu, Native American, Pagan, and Humanist – have joined in, hosted, or collaborated in our events. As always, laughter, dialogue, and good food abound. There is no “inside” and no “outside”. Only one great big, endless table.

May the walls come tumbling down!

Sarah



## An Expanding Board Table:

In order to reflect the growing diversity of our student population, the Wilson Center Board of Directors has also grown! We now have 17 Board members representing Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Unitarian Universalist, and Humanist traditions. Members are as follows:

Rev. Susan Davenport, President  
 Rev. Lorna Grenfell, Vice-President  
 Dr. John Maddaus, Secretary  
 David Kroehler, Treasurer  
 Rev. Grace Bartlett  
 Dr. Phyllis Brazee

Dr. Sandra Caron  
 Laurie Cartier  
 Mary Cathcart  
 Marwa Elkelani  
 Silvestre Guzman  
 Thomas Halkett

Rabbi Darah Lerner  
 Khadim Niang  
 Rabbi William Siemers  
 Dr. Stefano Tijerina  
 Dina Yacoubagha



## Expanding Tables for Conversation:

The following is a partial list of events sponsored by the Wilson Center last semester:

Weekly: Wed Dinner and Dialogue group – home-cooked food followed by various

discussion, worship and social events ; Monday Meditation (in the style of Thich Nhat Hanh); SpiritualiTEA - member-led discussions of big topics over a cup of hot (or iced!) tea each Monday at 5:30pm; Orono Friends meeting, 10am Sunday mornings.

Monthly: Art & Spirituality nights; “Come to the Table” multifaith discussions – topics this semester included “Suffering and Our Responses to It,” “Clarifying Misconceptions about Islam,” and “Religion and Sex.”

Once to three times a semester: Live-Music Coffee Houses featuring student musicians; Interfaith Luncheon Series co-sponsored by the UMaine Judaic Studies Program and the Jewish Community Endowment Associates – topics this semester included “Mystical Experiences”, “Forgiveness”, and “Women in Our Traditions”



One-time: Celebrations (including Advent, Chanukah, Eid, Ash Wednesday, Interfaith Water Ceremony, Multifaith Blessings and Benediction Service, and Transgender Day of Remembrance); Movie showings (including “A Way of Life”, “The Penobscot: Ancestral River, Contested Territory, and “Merchants of Doubt”); Art Exhibits (such as Anna Shapiro’s “Parvietosana: Reflecting on Genocide and Healing through Art in Sacred Spaces”); and Visiting Speakers (such as Colin Goddard, Rabbi Richard Address and Reza Jalali).

## A New Altar Table:

As part of our multifaith expansion, the cross from the outside of our building is being re-dedicated and transformed. Over the summer it will be re-made into an altar table for our sanctuary space. Walter Turner’s daughter and wife, Barbara and Dorothy, have written the following inscription for the new table:

*“Originally called the Maine Christian Association, The Wilson Center was re-named for Dorothy Clarke and Rev. Elwin Wilson whose vision of peace, justice and ecumenical spiritual exploration informs our mission to this day. “The House that Moses Built” was financed by proceeds from the film rights to Dorothy’s novel The Prince of Egypt, which was made into the movie The Ten Commandments.*

*This table was made with wood from the cross dedicated to Walter Turner for his many years of service to The Wilson Center. He would approve of this reuse of materials!”*



## Tables of Justice

The Wilson Center has been involved in many social justice projects over the years. Collaborations with Maine Interfaith Power and Light, donations to the Shaw House in Bangor, and support of the Penobscot Nation in their legal battles to retain their treaty-protected fishing rights all continue. This semester we have also supported the Hope Festival put on by the Peace and Justice

Center of Eastern Maine; the film “Living for 32” brought to campus by Maine Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense; the UMaine Green Team in their creation of an amazing Earth Day celebration on the mall; and the UMaine African Student Association in their trip to the African Development Conference at Harvard University. The SCOPE grants for Social Justice and Community Service have also been reinstated (see write-up which follows for more details on these grants).

One of our newest projects this spring is a collaboration between the Wilson Center, the Bodwell Center, and the Good Shepherd Food Bank. Working together these three organizations will be able to bring significantly cheaper food to the Black Bear Exchange, a food pantry and clothing swap serving the UMaine community. The vision of the Black Bear Exchange is to create “a community in which all who work, attend, live near and are affected by the University of Maine have equitable access to resources and where creative, situation-specific collaborations are actively nurtured to meet needs”. For more information on the Exchange go to the following link: <http://umaine.edu/volunteer/black-bear-exchange/>



The Wilson Center has also begun a collaboration with the new UMaine Chapter of the Peace and Justice Center of Eastern Maine. We have been pleased to host several events for the Chapter this spring promoting their premiere project “What’s Your Number?” which is a Student-Led Initiative focusing on student debt as a social injustice. For more information on this project, you can email Lacey Cargnino at: [lacey.r.cargnino@maine.edu](mailto:lacey.r.cargnino@maine.edu) or wait for our fall newsletter.

## Winners of the 2015 SCOPE grants!

### Sze Wing Wong / Olivia White & Aleeza Stearns

The SCOPE grants were established in honor of Elizabeth Morris in the 1990s and provide funding for Social Justice and Community Service Projects led by UMaine students. Winners receive grants in the amount of \$750 and mentoring by Wilson Center staff.

#### Sze Wing Wong



*With the increasing misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims by various media platforms in the United States, my project – a documentary short entitled “A Way of Life” – aims to rectify the misconceptions towards the group. The film is set at the University of Maine, focusing primarily on Muslim students on campus. This film has only one goal – to encourage other students to learn more and understand Islam through the very basics: conversations and stories. Let them tell you what Islam truly represents.*

## Olivia White & Aleeza Stearns

The Community Literacy Project involves the building and installation of a Free Little Library and a Story Walk that will be located in the Orono community. The Free Little Library will be stocked full of free books provided by our partners at the Lifespan Community Literacy Center. Our goal with this project is to inspire people of all ages to read, especially those who wouldn't have access to quality literature otherwise. The Story Walk will provide an opportunity for children and families to enjoy reading while getting exercise outdoors. We hope that at a young age, children will feel like they are part of the UMaine community, and see themselves as future college students.



## Antonia Carroll wins the 2016 Dorothy Clarke Wilson Peace Writing Prize



From left to right: Muna Abdullahi (Director of Multicultural Student Life), Antonia Carroll & Sarah Marx

Antonia is double majoring in International Affairs and Chemistry and will graduate in 2017. She is the Vice-President of the Wilson Center student group and a member of both the International Student Association and the African Student Association.

To read or listen to Antonia's winning poem, "Still Stirring," go to:  
<http://umaine.edu/wilsoncenter/peace-prizes-and-community-service-grants/>

Honorable mention: "Gains as Losses" by Connor Wood; "If We Wait 'til it is Still" by Hannah Ladd; "Don't Still It" by Noelle Leon-Palmer; and "First Law of Peace" by Stephanie Dunton.

## Administrative Assistant & Multi-Faith Fellow: Lacey Darling



Hi Everyone! I have been working with the Wilson Center since the Spring 2016 semester, and have enjoyed many events here during my time at the University of Maine. I will be entering my final year at UMaine, in the International Affairs/ International Security program, in the Fall of 2016. My studies focus on how community-based, non-violent activism and programs allowing for open dialogue help to prevent national security threats throughout the world. My work with the Wilson Center has helped me further shape my ideals related to sustainable peace in the world, and the means of achieving it. My husband and I are expecting our first child, Henry Sawyer Darling, in July, and can't wait to add him to the Wilson Center family! I look forward to seeing you at events, and around the UMaine/Orono community in the Fall!



## Want to hear what students have to say about the Wilson Center? Read these comments from recent graduates:

“This place has almost been like a second home to me during my time at UMaine. . . [It] taught me how to live a life full of perseverance, faith and vibrancy.”

“When I first came to the Wilson Center I was living with people who complained about petty things and talked behind others’ backs. The regular attendees at Wednesday dinner restored my faith in humanity. We come from diverse cultural, religious and economic backgrounds but we all share an inherent appreciation of tolerance and learning about differences. You’ve given me the most meaningful human connection of my time at UMaine. Keep on going!”

“I thank the Universe for bringing me in touch with this space. . . At the Wilson Center I met a lot of like-minded people and people from various backgrounds – and in my interactions with them I found out something I knew deep inside – that at the core of it all, we are all connected to a universal unifying force – a force that beckons us to do good – because doing good makes us feel good – and feeling good makes everything around us good. . . . I will surely stay in touch and I hope to carry forward all the things I learned here.”



“I have wonderful memories of this place – of acceptance, of laughter, of good food, of kind words, of friendship and love . . It has given a much needed platform to many people to voice their fears and pain and happiness by creating a space where people may disagree peacefully and learn about views other than their own. I think “Come to the Table” is one of the most powerful and needed discussion platforms I have ever come across. Thanks . . . for being so accepting and welcoming and spreading love around.”



“The Wilson Center has brought me so much peace and really opened my eyes to what open, respectful, vulnerable multifaith discussions can look like. I hope the Center keeps being a place of togetherness for a long, long time – it’s a place I’ll carry in my heart the rest of my life.”

“You gave me something to look forward to when I had nothing; you helped me find a community, find a faith; you provided a place where my best friendships blossomed. My life has only been as full as it has been these years because of you. I’m so thankful this place exists and I found it when I did. I’ll miss it so much.”

“This place feels like a second home to us all. It has been an important part of our graduate studies, social lives and spiritual journeys.”

“The Wilson Center is what turned my UMaine experience around. I found a supportive community and friends, and a place to explore my spirituality. I’m ever grateful for the experiences I’ve had here, and the relationships I’ve found.”

“The Wilson Center . . . changed my life. Everything I saw myself becoming and everything I wanted myself to be was grown here. The Wilson Center is a greenhouse for the social-justice-minded, the multifaith-hearted and all people desiring to make a contribution to the future.”



**THANKS TO ALL OF YOU WHO MAKE THE WILSON CENTER POSSIBLE!**

As our multifaith mission has expanded, we have been blessed this year by advice and support from Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, Bishop Cliff Ives, the Islamic Center of Maine, Beth El, Beth Israel, Dean Dana at the Office of Student Life, and many others both on and off campus. We thank you each for your letters, your visits, your wisdom and your unwavering support of our expanded mission.

If there’s one thing I have learned in my years at the Wilson Center, it’s that the power of increasing love and connection cannot be stopped. It’s like those crazy mushrooms that come up through concrete. May the power of such growth fill your hearts each day!

*Sarah*

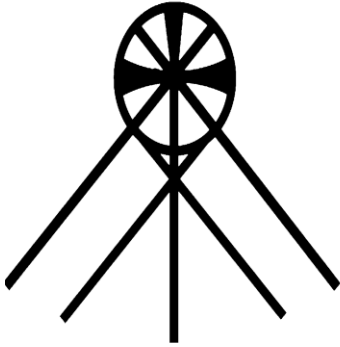


**The Wilson Center**

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

67 College Ave  
Orono, ME 04473

Bulk Mail Permit  
No. 1009  
Orono, ME  
04473



Phone: 207-866-4227 E-mail: [sarah.marx@umit.maine.edu](mailto:sarah.marx@umit.maine.edu)

**Web:** [umaine.edu/wilsoncenter](http://umaine.edu/wilsoncenter) **Facebook:** [wilsoncenter.mca](https://www.facebook.com/wilsoncenter.mca)

**May your summer be filled with sunshine and love!**



**The mission of the Wilson Center is to provide progressive, ecumenical and multifaith campus ministry for the University of Maine community, and through worship, study and service, to work for social justice, honor diversity and offer opportunities for spiritual growth.**