

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Area High Schoolers Look at Syrian Unrest from a Global Perspective at USM's Starr Global Studies Institute 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Human Rights Conference**

*Monday, April 16*



(Leavenworth, Kan.)—The University of Saint Mary and USM's Lawrence D. Starr Global Studies Institute (GSI) will help high schoolers from as far away as Topeka broaden their understanding of the larger world at USM's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Global Human Rights Conference for High School Students.

The conference runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Monday, April 16, at the university's Leavenworth campus, 4100 South 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

Saint Mary students from the Global Context of Conflict class taught by Dr. Natalya Riegg, professor of political science and global studies, will facilitate the conflict resolution exercises. Each year, Saint Mary hosts teams of high school students who play the roles of various parties with a dedicated interest in a current global conflict. Saint Mary students build the scenario for this role playing exercise—including composing the roles and gathering the historical information—and help facilitate the conference.

Participants in this year's conference focuses on the disparate views of the United States and Russia on the ongoing conflict in Syria, and how these differences may reflect a broader divide between the two countries.

This year's edition of the conference builds off of Project WE, an initiative of USM's department of history, political science & global studies that put Saint Mary students in touch with students at the Institute for Russian Language in Moscow. As part of the project, students at the two universities built a virtual classroom through social media venues and explored their differing viewpoints on topics like freedom, security, justice, and their countries' respective roles in world affairs.

The students' work in Project WE directly informs the scenario in the Human Rights Conference. Dr. Levon Saakyan, a professor of Russian literature at the Institute for Russian Language who oversaw his school's participation in Project WE, will be in attendance at April 16's event.

"Our students put a full year of research, writing, and other work into building this event," USM's Dr. Riegg said. "In Project WE, they came to recognize some of the differences between the American and Russia worldview, but they also learned to bridge those differences and made connections that remain strong to this day."

Dr. Ken Mulliken, director of USM's Global Studies Institute, added that "this program provides a remarkable opportunity for high school students to both better understand the world and exercise their own critical thinking skills. A conference like this makes learning an active experience."

Participating local high schools include Cristo Rey, Immaculata, Lansing, Pleasant Ridge, and St. Pius X. Students from Topeka High, Highland Park, and Washburn Rural in Topeka, Kan., will also be involved in the conference.

Organizers expect about 100 student attendees at this year's event. Last year's GSI Human Rights Conference, which focused on the Turkish-Armenia conflict, drew more than 120 area high school students.

Call (913) 758-6117 or visit <http://gsi.stmary.edu> for more information.

*The Lawrence D. Starr Global Studies Institute (GSI) is a professional academic organization dedicated to the examination of global integration and to the promotion of attitudes, policies, and practices that foster peace, justice, generosity, and the equitable enrichment of life for all members of the global community.*

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