



## HOLOCAUST, GENOCIDE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION INITIATIVE AT PENN STATE

### **The Holocaust, Armenia, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur:**

over the past hundred years, violence against populations has occurred on an unimaginable scale. Education about difficult topics such as genocide is vital to maintaining an informed, democratic citizenship. Yet today, young people display a disturbing lack of awareness of the Holocaust and other genocides.

Penn State is working to revolutionize the instruction of difficult topics, including coping with trauma such as that inflicted by the COVID-19 crisis, through the Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education Initiative. This innovative, interdisciplinary effort involves a collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), various nonprofit organizations around the world, and multiple units across the University. By developing new and enhanced programming and training for K-12 teachers, the Initiative will transform the way students encounter and make meaning of these challenging subjects.

The College of Education, the College of the Liberal Arts, the Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications, Penn State Harrisburg, Penn State Law, and other areas of the University will combine forces to implement the Initiative in schools throughout Pennsylvania and, eventually, other states as well. Given budgetary and staffing limitations—exacerbated by COVID-19—private philanthropy will be crucial. We are inviting alumni, friends, and community members to join us in this effort to strengthen Holocaust and genocide education throughout Pennsylvania—and beyond.

### **TRANSFORMING HOLOCAUST EDUCATION**

Despite the oft-repeated slogan “Never Again,” research shows that today’s young people know remarkably little about the Holocaust and other acts of genocide. Understanding these events is essential to a strong society in an increasingly polarized world and can help to prevent future atrocities. But these are difficult subjects to teach, and school systems across the country struggle to present them to students effectively.

Pennsylvania took an important step forward in 2014 by passing Act 70, which calls for the state’s public schools to incorporate Holocaust and genocide education into the K-12 curriculum. At the national level, Congress recently passed into law the Never Again Education Act, which expands Holocaust education throughout the country. Penn State has entered into an agreement with the PDE to revolutionize Holocaust and genocide education, building a national model for training and instructional programming on this topic. Penn State’s Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education Initiative will be the first effort of its focus and scope.

Drawing from expertise across a range of fields, Penn State faculty and students will implement a multipronged initiative:

- **Provide teacher professional development:** Develop new trainings informed by the latest research and best practices in professional development and designed for educators at multiple grade levels.
- **Curate, customize, and deliver content:** Select the best content from multiple partners; customize it for delivery in different content areas and grade levels; and disseminate it through a robust, easy-to-use, and freely accessible learning management system.
- **Create immersive new-media technologies:** Explore ways to enhance this education with new technologies such as augmented and virtual reality.
- **Study the initiative:** Research the program’s effectiveness and disseminate lessons learned and best practices to the public and academic community.



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These elements will give teachers the training and resources to tackle Holocaust and genocide education in ways that are memorable and meaningful for their students. This programming will encourage students to recognize the conditions that lead to large-scale violence and to find ways to apply those lessons to their own lives—for instance, to counter hateful attitudes among their peers or take a stand against smaller-scale injustices.

This cutting-edge, multi-college Initiative has begun the initial work of partnering with other educational institutions—such as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation—and hiring doctoral students to develop instructional material and train teachers. The effort is also working with the PDE to develop online trauma-informed training to assist teachers and school staff in helping students cope with crises such as COVID-19.

### THE NEXT STEPS FORWARD

Though still in its early stages, the Initiative is already making progress. For example, its faculty have expanded its network of partners, both internal and external; have presented at two Pittsburgh Holocaust Center teacher training seminars; and have begun research to help measure the efficacy of the Initiative's efforts. At the early stage of America's COVID-19 crisis in March 2020, the Initiative released its first set of free learning resources to assist teachers and parents with virtual education and home schooling, respectively.

Moving forward, we envision two phases for the Initiative over the next six years. In the first phase, Penn State will complete the development of the program, train and work with Pennsylvania teachers, and set up the framework for a national model. In the second phase, the University will continue to expand its reach in the Commonwealth while rolling out its national model, partnering with other states and districts:

- **Phase 1:** Train and work with teachers from 50 Pennsylvania districts in year 1. Increase the number of participating districts in the state to 125 in year 2, and 250 in year 3.
- **Phase 2:** Increase the number of participating Pennsylvania districts to 400 in year 3, and to 501 (the total number in the Commonwealth) in year 5. Simultaneously, train and work with teachers from districts in other states, starting with 50 districts in year 4 and increasing to 250 in year 6.

Actualizing this bold vision will require collaborations not just of institutions and personnel but also philanthropic partnerships with individuals and organizations that share our vision of a world free of genocidal violence—a world in which the coming generations are well prepared to take action to prevent atrocities and defend the rights and dignity of all people.

### YOUR SUPPORT

The pieces are in place to make this Initiative a success, but we simply cannot move forward without outside support. Budgetary considerations were already a limiting factor, but the COVID-19 pandemic has placed further strain on our resources—for example, we are unable to fill open faculty positions and face reduced funding for graduate student support. In the face of these new challenges, philanthropy can make all the difference.

Among our priorities are the following investments in faculty, student, and program costs required to implement the plans described above. These may be funded initially through annual gifts, but we will eventually seek to create permanent endowments that provide long-term support for:

- Project managers
- Faculty resources
- Graduate assistantships
- Undergraduate fellowships
- Development of instructional materials
- Teacher professional development training

Gifts can contribute to these elements or may be directed to a general fund designed to help ensure long-term sustainability. The Initiative has received a lead gift from an anonymous donor, facilitated by the Harrisburg-based Jewish Community Foundation (JCF) of Central Pennsylvania; matching funds associated with these gifts are available through the JCF.

Support for the Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education Initiative is an opportunity to powerfully impact the lives of students across Pennsylvania and, eventually, the country, as well as the fate of communities around the world. Your philanthropy will help to ensure that they learn from the tragedies of the past and will in turn empower them to become empathetic, engaged citizens well equipped to build a better future.

For more information, contact:

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