Human Rights Month

The concern for human rights is a relatively recent development in the history of international relations, as is an expansion of what constitutes a “human right.” From the creation of the nation-state system in the mid-1600s, all nation-states (commonly called countries) were considered sovereign. Sovereignty is a legal concept that essentially means governments are not obligated to obey any higher authority in their deciding how they will address both domestic and international affairs. In the strictest sense of sovereignty, a nation-state does not have to sign a treaty if its government does not agree with its provisions. Similarly, if a government decides to oppress its people in whatever way(s), it is able to do so. The United States’ refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol is a contemporary example of the former; the oppression of dissidents in Burma is an example of the latter.

In the previous century, adherence to strict interpretations of sovereignty led to horrific human rights abuses. Mao Zedong’s failed industrial and agricultural policies of the late 1950s and early 1960s, China’s so-called “Great Leap Forward,” took the lives of an estimated 20 to 30 million people, yet the United States and its allies could do nothing in response. In part that was due to sovereignty, but just as significant was the U.S. “refusal” to recognize the world’s most populous (communist) nation-state, limiting how much influence the U.S. could have. In retrospect, could a policy—either Mao’s or that of the United States—be judged a type of human rights abuse? What about refusing the asylum application of a woman fleeing female genital mutilation, in which the government of her country of origin is indifferent, complicit, or directly involved in this “tradition”? What is a “human rights abuse”? And, when they occur, what can—or, more appropriately, should—be done, as the Gustavus Mission Statement proclaims, to “affirm the dignity of all people”? We might hope that compassionate, peace-loving people will have the opportunity to appeal to the slimmest of moral conscience of government leaders. Yet despite the proliferation of international NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in the post-Cold War world, their presence in nation-states experiencing human rights abuses is contingent on the approval of those nation-states’ governments. Sovereignty again. A more universal conception of human rights is a work in progress, but realization of even the most basic of those rights is certainly not universally enjoyed.
Kwanzaa

Each year Gustavus holds a celebratory banquet in honor of the pan-African holiday Kwanzaa. Traditionally put on by the Pan Afrikan Student Organization (PASO), the event has been very successful and has been nominated for the Paul Magnuson Award twice.

This year’s keynote speaker is Dr. Rose Brewer, professor of African American studies at the University of Minnesota. The program will also feature music, poetry, and dance performances.

Kwanzaa is a week-long celebration featuring activities such as candle-lighting and pouring of libations, and culminating in a feast and gift-giving celebration. As a pan-African holiday celebrated by millions throughout the world, Kwanzaa brings a cultural message that speaks to the best of what it means to be African and human in the fullest sense.

PASO welcomes everyone to come and learn or just enjoy this celebration of heritage. Look for this year’s Kwanzaa banquet on Thursday, Dec. 6, in Alumni Hall at 5:30 p.m. Please sign up at the Diversity Center or the SAO desk by Dec. 3.

Funto Okanla

On a beautiful fall morning, I drove up the hill to the exciting screams of Gustie Greeters welcoming me to what would be my home for the next 3½ years. Did I even want to be a Gustie? Unlike most high school seniors, I just picked Gustavus out of the blue. I had no idea what to expect. I remember feeling a little overwhelmed, wondering how I ended up in a college full of overachievers, but I would not trade my experience here for anything else.

I have enjoyed being challenged and constantly active during the past three years. I have tried to seize every opportunity to stay involved in student organizations. I have had the opportunity to develop and enhance useful skills through my involvement in the International Cultures Club, the Campus Activities Board, the Gustavus chapter of Amnesty International, and other groups. One of the highlights of my time here at Gustavus has been my yearly participation in track and field.

It has been an important tool in my personal development and will be hard to give up.

As a student I find myself spending endless hours in the library, but whenever I’m not studying or being involved in other activities, I enjoy catching up on episodes of Prison Break. The challenges I’ve faced on campus, mistakes made, skills gained, and lifelong friendships I’ve made have all been instrumental in making my college experience memorable.

After I graduate in December, I will be working as an auditor with Ernst and Young LLP. I am looking forward to this experience, as it will be taking me out of Minnesota to the city of Philadelphia, Pa.

Although there are many things and people to be missed, my most cherished and therefore most missed activity will be sledding down the Old Main Hill on caf trays!

See you all at the top!
Living the Extremes

Remember moving into your residence hallroom as a first-year student? Who was one of the first people to welcome you to your new home? Who do you think will be one of the last to see you as you graduate? It’s probably a Residential Life staff member.

Have you ever been lonely, homesick, or frustrated and had a Residential Life staff member reach out to you with an offer to “just listen”? Have you done your personal best on a test or caught the winning touchdown pass and just needed to tell someone, and had your CF or HR comment on your efforts?

As you were growing up, more likely than not you did not share a bedroom with a sibling. Some students did not share a bathroom. Now, you have had the opportunity to share an intimate room with a person who was initially a stranger and now may be a close friend.

Even the residence hall buildings are designed to be extreme in different ways. With a single building population of 60 students, Prairie View Hall is the smallest on campus, while the Complex is the largest area with 480 residents. Hall designs move you from more dependent living (Pittman) to more independent living environments (College View Apartments) during your four years.

Residential Life staff members often deal with the extremes of students’ experiences. Staff members help you create community-living environments that support your academic work, provide opportunities to get to know your fellow community members and Gusties, and develop a safe and supportive environment for talking, interacting, and learning with and from one another. The key word here is learning.

Learning, personal growth, and development can, but do not always, occur in a comfortable, easy, or planned manner. Being presented with and working through a “lifestyle or interpersonal challenge” within your living environment is not wholly dissimilar to addressing a challenging academic problem within a classroom. From planned programs and activities to judicial discussions to counseling conversations, Residential Life staff members provide supportive opportunities for personal reflection and growth.

If you would like to talk to any of the Residential Life Staff members, please contact the office at x7529.

The International Cultures Club (ICC) is a student-run organization that brings international and American students together in an open, engaged, and fun environment. Open to all interested students, ICC promotes an appreciation of cultural diversity and international awareness with goals to share cultures, provide new and exciting experiences, encourage communication, and inspire a community of global citizens.

ICC’s International Festival is open to the entire campus as well as the local community. In addition to the Festival, ICC also coordinates “Tea around the World,” ethnic cooking, a trip to the Festival of Nations in St. Paul, guest lecturers, cultural outings, and participation in the International Festival at South Elementary School in St. Peter.

The oldest record of ICC tracks back to 1974, when the organization was active under its previous name, ISO (International Student Organization). Recently, the organization changed its name to International Cultures Club (ICC) to reflect openness and accessibility to both international and U.S. students, and also created the American co-president position to help further connect the international and American student body.

ICC is a great way to get involved in your community, build friendships, and have unforgettable experiences! When asked what her favorite part about ICC is, Mengdi Wu mentioned how the club provided many opportunities for her to make new friends. Come see for yourself! ICC’s weekly meeting is on Thursday at the International Education Office at 6 p.m. You can also contact Chelsea (ckramer2@gustavus.edu) or Jing Han (jsoh2@gustavus.edu) for more information. We look forward to getting to know you!
**World Watch**

**Pakistan—Political Struggle**—Pakistan freed opposition leader Benazir Bhutto from house arrest on Friday, Nov. 16. Jail officials left the residence in the eastern city of Lahore, where Bhutto has been held to prevent her from leading a pro-democracy rally against President Pervez Musharraf's emergency rule. Bhutto's release comes ahead of a planned visit by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, who will push General Musharraf to end the emergency rule he imposed two weeks ago in an apparent bid to hold on to the presidency.

**United Nation—The Death Penalty**—At least 87 countries jointly introduced a draft resolution calling for a moratorium with a view to abolishing capital punishment. Two similar moves in the 1990s failed in the 192-member assembly, whose resolutions are non-binding but carry moral authority. Supporters of the death penalty range throughout the world, with China, Iran, Iraq, the United States, Pakistan, and Sudan accounting for about 90 percent of all executions worldwide.

**Cultural Connections**

**December 4—11—Hanukkah (Jewish):** Around 164 B.C., the Maccabees, a small group of Jews fighting for religious freedom, won victory over the Syrians. Entering Jerusalem to rededicate the Temple, the legend goes, they found only one jar of holy oil but miraculously the candelabra remained lit for 8 days—the current length of the Festival of Lights.

**December 25—Christmas (Christian):** An annual holiday that originates with Christians in feasts celebrating the birth of Jesus. Christmas festivities often combine the commemoration of Jesus’ birth with various secular customs, many of which have been influenced by earlier winter festivals. Modern Christmas traditions have come to include the display of Nativity scenes, holly and Christmas trees, the exchange of gifts and cards, and the arrival of Father Christmas or Santa Claus on Christmas.