

Lara Olson

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SUMMARY

I have combined leading roles in practitioner-focused research, training, and evaluation of international peacebuilding efforts with academic research and teaching on international peacebuilding and civil wars at the University of Calgary. My goals are to produce insights based on rigorous social science research on peacebuilding processes to advance scholarship as well as inform practical frameworks that improve the effectiveness of international support for peace.

EDUCATION

DPhil, International Relations, Department of Politics and International Relations (*ongoing*)

University of Oxford, U.K., October 1, 2014-present.

I have completed all required coursework, conducted most of my fieldwork and aim to complete the doctorate by 2019. My thesis is titled, "Linking Good and Bad Civil Society: How Local Networks Promote Peace or Renewed Violence in Civil Wars". The study examines the role of in-group networks and influence in the dynamics of civil wars and peacebuilding and shows how these are impacted by dominant models of transnational support for civil society peacebuilding through studies of Georgia and Kosovo.

M.Sc. International Relations (With Distinction)

London School of Economics, UK. September 1, 1990–August 31, 1991.

I graduated the top student in my year in the M.Sc. program with coursework focused on international political economy and Eastern European and Soviet studies. My thesis, "Midwives to the Market" focused on the role of joint ventures as cooperative economic instruments in shifting East-West political and economic relations.

Advanced Russian Language Diploma

Lenin Pedagogical Institute, Moscow & *University of Alberta*, Canada. September 1, 1989–June 30, 1990.

I attained fluency in Russian in this joint Russian-Canadian language diploma program, involving 4 months at the University of Alberta and 5 months at a partner institute in Moscow.

B.A. Political Science (First Class Honours)

University of British Columbia, Canada. September 1, 1985-April 30, 1989.

I completed a combined political science honours degree with a special concentration in international relations.

RESEARCH WORK EXPERIENCE & ACHIEVEMENTS

Co-Director, the Building Durable Peace Project, May 1, 2009 - December 1, 2013.

This collaborative research project (co-directed with Hrach Gregorian) brought together conflict specialists with systems analysts to analyze country-wide, civil-military peace operations as complex adaptive systems. Drawing on case studies in Kosovo, Liberia and Afghanistan, the analysis showed how international assistance inputs were fueling negative outcomes, as well as positive results. I directed the research, conducted field work in Kosovo and Liberia, did expert interviews with EU, UN, NATO, and NGO personnel at headquarters and authored the Liberia and Kosovo cases. As well, with systems specialist Brian Woodward, I conducted the systems analysis for Liberia and Kosovo and coauthored those reports. The project engaged practitioners and policy makers in two expert workshops in Calgary and Washington, D.C. and we presented the interim findings in Washington at the Alliance for Peacebuilding in May 2013. Currently we are finalizing a book manuscript based on the findings and plan to develop briefings and training materials for practitioners and international agencies. Funders were the US Institute of Peace, NATO's Public Diplomacy division, the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Institute of World Affairs.

Research Director, Community Perceptions & Conflict Prevention Needs in the Georgian-South Ossetian Boundary Area & among IDPs in Georgia, CARE UK & CARE Georgia, Jan.–August 2009.

I led a field-based research process examining the dynamics of the August 2008 war in South Ossetia and Georgia. I designed the research instruments, as well as provided operational guidance for the research teams working across lines of conflict to examine the causes and effects of the war, as well as local-level conflict dynamics in selected villages on both sides. I co-facilitated a three-day dialogue and analysis workshop bringing together both research teams in a neutral location (Armenia) to review findings and devise joint conclusions and recommendations for possible confidence building and humanitarian initiatives. I worked with CARE staff to synthesize the findings into the final report, which was disseminated to donors and partners in the Caucasus and shaped CARE's aid programming in the region.

Co-Director, Coordinated Approaches to Security, Development and Peacemaking, Jan.-Dec. 2007.

Together with Hrach Gregorian, I organized and facilitated a major policy & practice focused conference and publication taking stock of interagency coordination in two major peace operations, Afghanistan and Liberia. The workshop was funded by CIDA, NATO, and several US foundations and brought together government and civil society actors from Afghanistan, Liberia, Canada and the US with UN, EU and NATO policy makers and experts. The workshop probed the gap between the policy consensus on greater aid coordination and actual field practice, asking whether more coordination across agencies and sectors was creating better peacebuilding outcomes. The findings were disseminated in a report (“Side by Side or Together”), a policy brief (“Beyond Information Sharing & False Coherence”), and a special journal issue.

Coordinator & Research Director, Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, July 1999 - February 2003.

Together with Mary B. Anderson, I directed the initial 3-year research phase of this participatory research project within the global conflict resolution and peacemaking community. RPP became a major source of guidance on enhancing peacebuilding effectiveness in the practitioner community and its influence continues today. The project's innovative model examined the effectiveness of a very broad range of “peace practice” worldwide. The effort involved over 200 NGOs from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America, as well as representatives of UN agencies and regional organizations. I recruited participating agencies and directed the research and writing of 26 case studies of such peace efforts, writing several cases myself. I also managed 25 feedback workshops with partners around the world and personally co-facilitated many of these. I coauthored the final publication and the resulting RPP frameworks that are widely used today for assessing and improving peacebuilding strategies and impacts.

OTHER RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

Evaluation Consultant, Maintaining and Building Relationships in Societies Affected by the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict, Conciliation Resources, London, U.K., March 2017 and ongoing.

I am conducting a three-year developmental evaluation process in support of multilevel confidence building initiatives by leading British conflict resolution agency, Conciliation Resources (CR), funded by the Eastern Partnership of the U.K. government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. My role is to provide ongoing monitoring and strategic advice to the leadership team, and conduct a baseline study, mid-term evaluative and final summative evaluation of the program's impacts.

External Evaluation Consultant, Georgian-South Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhaz People to People Reconciliation Program, George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia, July 2014 - August 2016, Georgia, UK, and U.S.

I designed and implemented a developmental evaluation process in support of multilevel confidence building initiatives by a consortium of four leading US and British conflict resolution agencies. The two-year process included conducting a baseline analysis, field visits and participating in confidence building activities, providing detailed monitoring reports suggesting course corrections during the life of the project, providing regular consultation and strategic advice to the senior management team, and producing a final summative evaluation presented to donors and Washington D.C. area think tanks.

Co-Director, Peacebuilding, Development and Security Program (PDSP) and Research Fellow, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies (CMSS), University of Calgary, Canada, 2007 – 2013.

I co-created the PDSP program (with Dr. Hrach Gregorian), whose mission is practitioner-oriented research, graduate teaching and professional trainings to advance effective peacebuilding. The program has hosted numerous workshops and a major international conference, and developed the Building Durable Peace research project (described above). It has developed linkages across departments and faculties at the University of Calgary to bridge the peace studies and security studies scholarly communities and hosted numerous speakers and panels on peacebuilding for the university and broader Calgary communities. The program launched a flagship course, The Challenge of International Peacebuilding, offered to graduate students and mid-career professionals for many years, and in 2013 with the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the University of Calgary Development Office, I developed a funding initiative for a Chair in International Peacebuilding and related Policy and Practice Program with fundraising currently ongoing.

As a **Research Fellow at CMSS**, I presented my own research on and off campus, informally mentored graduate students working on peacebuilding themes, was a guest speaker in other graduate classes and created and taught a range of courses on peacebuilding and international assistance in conflict areas. (See the course listing for more information). The PDSP program moved to an institutional base with its US partner in 2013, The Institute of World Affairs, though the linkage with CMSS continues.

Sessional Instructor, Various Departments, University of Calgary, Sept. 2007–April 2014, Calgary, Alberta.

I co-created and co-taught graduate-level courses on peacebuilding across different departments with Hrach Gregorian. Alone, I created and taught undergraduate courses in the Department of International Relations and in the Faculty of Social Work, and I co-taught with several other faculty an elective course on Rule of Law at the University of Calgary Law School. For information on specific courses please see the course list.

Consultant & Conflict Specialist, the Human Security and Cities Initiative, Department of Foreign Affairs & International Trade (DFAIT), Government of Canada, March – April 2008.

I provided expertise on case study methods, conflict analysis and impact assessment of aid in conflict contexts in an expert workshop held at the Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia, and was further hired to provide editorial review of the project's analytical framework, case studies and report.

Consultant - Research Design Leader, Peace Operations Monitor Project, Peace Operations Working Group, Peacebuild, Ottawa, 2006 - 2008.

As an active member of the Ottawa-based working group within Peacebuild, the Canadian peacebuilding network, I developed the pilot phases of this online resource on UN and other current peace operations, directing a group of research assistants at the University of Calgary.

Consultant - Conflict Sensitivity, CARE International, Georgia, May–June 2005.

I developed and facilitated an in-depth field-based training process for local CARE staff. The training covered interactive conflict analysis and conflict sensitive development strategies for areas of southern Georgia with large ethnic minorities.

Consultant - Media and Conflict, the Georgia-South Ossetia Dialogue Project, Conflict Management Group (CMG), Cambridge, MA, USA, 1999.

I produced an in-depth report guiding CMG's peacebuilding programming in Georgia and South Ossetia, documenting and analyzing the role played by the Georgian, Ossetian and Russian media in the conflict from 1989 to 1999.

Coordinator, The Georgia-South Ossetia Dialogue Project, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) & Conflict Management Group (CMG), October 1996 – Aug. 1998, Georgia and the Russian Federation.

I developed and led interlinked relief, development and peacebuilding efforts in areas affected by the Georgian-Ossetian conflict - as head of NRC field offices in South Ossetia and in the adjoining North Ossetian autonomous republic of the Russian Federation. I managed NRC's humanitarian and refugee assistance programs and the agency's central role in the UNHCR-led refugee repatriation process. Simultaneously, I was Caucasus-based coordinator for NRC's NGO partner, the Conflict Management Group, which had initiated a political-level dialogue process funded

and supported by the Norwegian government. In this role, I liaised regularly with political leaders and heads of international agencies to support CMG in designing the approach and in maintaining strong relationships with all parties in the region. In addition, I worked with local governments, civic associations and NGOs to devise, fund and implement practical peacebuilding projects to address the legacy of the 1990-92 Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

Political and Features Writer, The News Review, Santiago, Chile, 1995.

I wrote feature articles covering the major social and political issues in Chile and the social and economic challenges posed by the legacy of the Pinochet years for this English language weekly paper.

Project Manager/Coeditor, International Organizations in Ethnic Conflict Project, the Consensus Building Institute, Jan. 1994 - June 1995, Cambridge, MA, United States.

I managed this multidisciplinary research project on the role of international organizations in preventing ethnic conflict in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. This Carnegie Corporation-funded project was a joint US-Russian effort, co-directed by Dr. Abram Chayes and Dr. Antonia Handler Chayes (faculty at the Harvard Law School and directors of the Consensus Building Institute) and Alexei Arbatov of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) in Moscow. As a Russian area specialist, my role focused on directing a team of six participating Russian scholars in writing case studies of the ethnic conflicts that were emerging in the former Soviet Union, including a mentoring process pairing them up with US counterparts to work jointly on the English versions of the cases. I co-edited the resulting volume and co-authored a chapter in the book on U.S. policy towards the post-Soviet space.

Research Associate, Dr. William Ury, The Program on Negotiation, Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA, USA, 1993 - 1994.

I conducted wide ranging interdisciplinary research on the causes of war and applicability of alternative dispute resolution approaches to contemporary interethnic conflicts, contributing to Dr. Ury's book, *The Third Side*, published in 2000. I also directed a group of graduate research assistants and coordinated a Harvard-MIT faculty seminar series on ethnic conflicts.

Field Coordinator - US Humanitarian Aid Program in Kazakhstan, CARE USA, Kazakhstan, 1992.

I directed local field monitors in travelling across Kazakhstan to support the distribution of U.S. government humanitarian aid by national and local government officials, the Kazak Red Crescent Society, and US Department of Defence personnel. My role also involved liaising with Kazakh local officials and civil society, and establishing a CARE sub-office in Almaty.

Writer and Politics Section Editor, The Moscow Times, Moscow, Russia, 1992.

Based in Moscow in the months following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, I wrote and edited news stories and contributed in-depth-features on the societal transitions underway for this English language weekly.

UNIVERSITY TEACHING

“Rule of Law”, Senior Elective Course, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, 2013 & 2014.

In this interdisciplinary course co-taught by several instructors, I taught 4 modules/classes on international development and peacebuilding frameworks and practice and the challenges with international rule of law programming.

“Contemporary Peacebuilding” - Advanced International Social Work Module, School of Social Work, University of Calgary, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014.

I taught a concentrated two-day module examining the conceptual, practical and ethical challenges encountered by today's expansive international peacebuilding missions, exploring leading policy and programming frameworks for effectively supporting peace and development in conflict environments. Some years were co-taught with Hrach Gregorian while others I taught alone.

“Humanitarianism, Peacebuilding and Statebuilding in War”, International Relations Senior Course, University of Calgary, 2012.

I taught this senior undergraduate course analyzing normative and operational frameworks driving international responses to armed conflict, focusing on areas of convergence across humanitarian, peacebuilding and statebuilding approaches, tradeoffs, ethical dilemmas and the challenges of impact assessment.

“The Challenge of Contemporary Peacebuilding”, Strategic Studies Graduate Seminar, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary, 2009, 2010, 2011.

I co-taught with Hrach Gregorian this week-long 40 hour course for graduate students and mid-career professionals examining the state of the field of international peacebuilding. The course examined the core policy frameworks for international peacebuilding efforts since the Cold War, and dynamics within key sectors and effective coordination across these, highlighting the challenges of local ownership, civil-military coordination and criteria for success.

“NGOs, Aid & Conflict”, International Relations Senior Course, University of Calgary, 2007.

I taught this semester-long senior undergraduate seminar focusing on the role of NGOs in the international response to conflict and humanitarian disasters. The course surveyed the origins of contemporary NGOs, operational roles in areas of conflict, and the relationship of NGOs to the military and political actors involved in international peace operations.

ACADEMIC AWARDS/HONOURS

SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship, 2016-2019 (C\$20,000/year). This three-year award covers fees, research expenses and maintenance for qualifying Canadian doctoral students in the social sciences.

James Lougheed Award of Distinction, 2016 & 2017 (C\$20,000/year). This two-year award recognizes academic excellence in Alberta students undertaking graduate study at institutions outside of Alberta.

Departmental Studentship Award 2015 (C\$36,000), Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, September 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016. The one year award contributes to fees and maintenance for students of merit already enrolled in the department.

Commonwealth Scholarship, 1990-91 (C\$30,000), U.K. The one-year award covered full funding for the M.Sc. at the London School of Economics.

“Peace Train” Fellowship for Russian Language Study, 1990 (\$8000), the Peace Train Foundation, Ottawa, Canada. Funded one student per year for the Dalhousie University/University of Alberta joint Russian Studies program to promote better understanding of East-West cultures and systems.

UBC Robert Lorne Stanfield Prize, 1989 (\$220), UBC Political Science Department.
Awarded for a student in the graduating class with an outstanding record of achievement.

UBC Mack Eastman United Nations Prize, 1989 (C\$200), UBC Political Science Department.
Awarded for the best essay on a problem related to international peace and security.

UBC H.G. Munroe Scholarship in Political Science, 1988-89 (C\$825), Faculty of Arts, UBC.
Awarded on recommendation of the department to the top 3rd Year Student in Political Science.

Perry Barr Hall Award, 1988-89 (C\$2000), University of British Columbia.
This award is granted for placing in the top 3% of third year arts and on recommendation of the Dean of Arts.

Mildred Brock Memorial Scholarship, 1987-88 (\$750).
Awarded for academic merit to women students who have completed at least one year at UBC.

University of BC Scholarships (varied amounts), 1986-87 & 1987-88.

LANGUAGES

English (native speaker)
Russian (advanced speaking and reading level, intermediate written)
Spanish (advanced speaking and reading level, intermediate written)
French (basic reading and speaking level)

PRESENTATIONS, WORKSHOPS, CONFERENCES

Presentation: “Improving Peacebuilding Coordination and Impact through Soft Systems Mapping”, Alliance for Peacebuilding, Washington, D.C., April 11 & 12, 2013. *(Co-host and lead presenter)*

I was the lead presenter on the findings of the Building Durable Peace research project, together with Hrach Gregorian and Brian Woodward. The presentation involved an interactive session on the methodology of systems mapping of peacebuilding outcomes in the cases of Kosovo and Liberia to an audience of policy makers, NGO representatives and academics from the Washington, D.C. area. I made another briefing on the policy implications of the project’s findings the following day to a larger audience of policy makers and people from DC area think tanks.

Presentation: “Challenges of International Peacebuilding”, Project Ploughshares, Feb. 17, 2010. Calgary

I presented as a guest speaker to the Calgary chapter of Project Ploughshares on the challenge of coordination in the multinational peace mission in Kosovo, based on field work I had conducted in Kosovo in late 2009.

Workshops: “Georgia-South Ossetia People to People Dialogue Process”, School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia, 2008-2009. *(Expert resource person)*

I served as an area and peacebuilding expert in this civil society focused dialogue process with meetings in December 2008 in Washington D.C. and in Istanbul in June 2009. I supported Dr. Susan Allen Nan of GMU’s School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution in organizing and strategizing both events and facilitating small group sessions. The process was the first such civil society dialogue to take place successfully after the August 2008 war.

Workshop: “Assessing Integrated Approaches in Afghanistan - Expert Workshop”, Institute of World Affairs, Washington, D.C., December 15, 2008. *(Co-host, presenter and co-facilitator)*

I co-organized and co-facilitated this one day workshop with Hrach Gregorian, bringing together US and Canadian civilian and military practitioners and scholars for a review of the experience of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams and other integrated civil-military aid mechanisms in the international mission in Afghanistan.

Conference: “Coordinated Approaches to Security, Development and Peacemaking”, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies (CMSS), University of Calgary, March 30-31, 2007. *(Co-host, presenter, facilitator)*

I co-organized and co-facilitated with Hrach Gregorian this international scholar-practitioner conference involving 25 aid practitioners and government policy makers from Liberia and Afghanistan, NATO, CIDA and the EU, and academic experts from Europe and North America.

REFEREED PUBLICATIONS

Olson, Lara and Andrea Charron, “NGO Myths, Realities and Advocacy on the International Strategy in Afghanistan.” Chapter 5 in, The Afghanistan Challenge: Hard Realities and Strategic Choices. Edited by Hans-Georg Ehrhart and Charles Pentland. McGill Queens University Press: 2009 *(lead author)*

Olson, Lara and Hrach Gregorian, guest editors. Civil-Military Coordination: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan and Beyond. Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies, Vol. 3, 2008. Series Editor: Dr. John Ferris. University of Calgary: 2008. *(Lead editor, co-author of introduction and conclusion)*

Olson, Lara. "Fighting for Humanitarian Space: NGOs in Afghanistan." In Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies: Canada in Kandahar; Vol. 1, 2007, edited by Dr. John Ferris and Dr. James Keeley, 45-64. University of Calgary: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, 2007. (*Sole author*)

Chayes, Antonia Handler, Abram Chayes, Alexei Arbatov, and Lara Olson, eds. Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997. (*Lead editor of 6 chapters that consisted of case studies of ethnic conflicts by Russian academics*)

Chayes, Abram, Lara Olson, and George Raach. "The Development of US Policy towards the Former Soviet Union." In Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives, edited by Antonia Handler Chayes, Abram Chayes, Alexei Arbatov, and Lara Olson, 493-536. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997. (*Contributing author*)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Olson Lara and Anja de Beer. "NGO Views of NATO strategy in Afghanistan," Nato at 60: Still on the Right Course. Security and Peace (Sicherheit und Frieden). Special Issue. January 2009. (*Lead author*)

Olson, Lara and Hrach Gregorian. "Side by Side or Together? Working for Security, Development and Peace in Liberia and Afghanistan," Peacebuilding, Development and Security Program, University of Calgary, Workshop Report, October 2007. (*Lead author*)

Olson, Lara and Hrach Gregorian. "Beyond Information Sharing & False Coherence: Interagency Coordination in International Peace Missions", Peacebuilding, Development and Security Program, University of Calgary, Policy Brief, October 2007. (*Lead author*)

Anderson, Mary B. and Lara Olson. Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners. Cambridge, MA: Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, Collaborative for Development Action, Inc., 2003. (*co-author*)

VOLUNTEER AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Member, Peace Studies Consortium & Informal Liaison with the Center for Military & Strategic Studies, University of Calgary, Jan. 2007 – Sept. 2014, Calgary, Alberta.

As a member of the Peace Studies Consortium and a fellow at CMSS, I played an informal liaison role to support more dialogue and engagement, to serve the needs of students and faculty interested in both peace and security. Concretely I negotiated for the Consortium to include the *Challenge of Contemporary Peacebuilding* course in their proposed curriculum and served on the working group to develop a minor in peace studies.

Chair, School Grounds Renewal Committee, King George School Parent Council, Sept. 2008 – June 2011, Calgary.

I led efforts at my children's elementary school to transform the bare schoolyard into a naturalized park space for the school and surrounding community. We engaged local and provincial government representatives, the Calgary Parks Foundation, and local businesses, raising 300,000 in funds and in-kind donations, and created a new playground integrated with naturalized areas and outdoor teaching spaces celebrating Calgary's natural prairie ecology.

Hastings Park Conservancy Member, April 2003 – August 2004. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

I played an active role in efforts to enhance public access, natural habitat, and green space in East Vancouver's Hastings Park. My role included strategizing community action, speaking at public hearings, fundraising and engaging the broader community through meetings, door knocking and public information efforts.