Taking Conflict Resolution Into the Digital World

From the traditional practices of Gandhian nonviolence to utilizing the latest in cutting-edge technology, Salisbury University alumnus Mike Wessel ’07 & M’12 has been passionate about the field of conflict resolution for the vast majority of his life.

For Wessel, it all began with his father’s involvement in nonviolent attempts to bring an end to the Vietnam War in the 1960s. “I grew up hearing stories of his experiences with nonviolence, which is obviously an area of study and practice that is directly connected to conflict resolution,” he said. “When I transferred to SU from Harford Community College in 2004, I was originally a political science major. I chose that major due to a deep fascination with international conflict and ongoing debates about important social issues in the U.S.

After taking my first conflict resolution course with Dr. Rachel Goldberg at SU, I quickly realized that a double major in political science and conflict resolution would be a natural fit for me. By combining these two academic areas, I realized I could start training for a meaningful career that would allow me to understand the major problems of the modern world, while also understanding some of the processes to bring about solutions and positive social change.”

Wessel graduated in 2007 with B.A.s in political science and conflict analysis and dispute resolution (CADR). His initial foray into the workforce as an insurance broker was successful, although he couldn’t shake the feeling that something was missing. Wessel began looking for a deeper level of fulfillment and became motivated to return to SU for graduate studies in 2010.

“I had already gained a good bit of material and financial success and still found myself generally dissatisfied with life,” he said. “I’m not saying that I now devote all of my time to helping others, but I do try to find ways each day that I can be of service to the people around me. I used to say that I was too busy to volunteer or to go out of my way to be available for people in need. The truth is that there is always time to give a little bit more of ourselves to those that are less fortunate. I’ve found more than anything that sometimes people just need someone to talk to and to listen to their story. So my encouragement to others is to check your values and ask yourself if you’re really satisfied with your life. If not, then go find someone less fortunate than you to help out, even if it’s just in some small way. I promise it will change your perspective for the better!”

As an undergraduate, Wessel was co-president of the Conflict Resolution Club, a student organization that allowed him to gain practical experience in conflict resolution skills at both the university and community level. When he returned in 2010, he was disappointed to find that the club had disbanded. With the help of Dr. Brian Polkinghorn, executive director at SU’s Center for Conflict Resolution, the club was revived.

“My pleasure is to say that it is again a fully functioning organization at SU that gives SU undergraduate students a chance to gain hands-on experience with conflict resolution processes,” Wessel said.

Wessel was the M.A. in CADR from SU in 2012. Recently, he developed two completely online courses for SU’s CADR Department.

“The first is CADR 200, which is an introduction to conflict analysis and resolution,” he said. “The other is focused on both Gandhian and strategic nonviolence.”

Wessel is also the vice president of Rezoud Academy, a Florida-based training and educational subsidiary of the Rezoud Corporation.

“Our company is geared toward providing technology assisted dispute resolution (TaDR) processes, consulting services and corporate dispute resolution training programs to Fortune 1000 corporations in the U.S. and abroad,” he said. “It’s not always easy working for a startup company like Rezoud or in a new and slowly emerging industry like TaDR. However, I’m certain that in five-to-ten years nearly all of the Fortune 1000 corporations will have adopted technology assisted processes to resolve their internal and external business disputes. The excitement of being part of something big like this far outweighs the difficulties associated with it.”

Wessel believes TaDR has far-reaching applications, including the development of e-government and e-courthouses.

“For a long time now in the U.S. and elsewhere companies have relied almost exclusively on their legal departments to handle disputes within their organizations, as well as disputes that arise with competitors, vendors and customers,” he said. “The problem here is that most business conflicts are not well suited for expensive multiyear win-lose legal processes. Through the use of continuously advancing video conferencing and mobile technology it’s now possible for trained mediators, arbitrators and other conflict specialists to help companies resolve the majority of their disputes more quickly and efficiently.

“In an increasingly digital world, it’s common sense for companies to make use of current technology to resolve their disputes. The cost of conflict to corporations is enormous, so it’s important for them to look beyond their legal departments and begin adopting more reasonable tools to handle the full spectrum of modern business disputes.”

With success and fulfillment finally balanced and thriving in his life, Wessel is able to look back on his time at SU with indelible praise.

“I’ve gained a better education at SU than I ever imagined, and I’m very grateful for the faculty and staff who have guided me along the way,” he said. “I’d have to say the most impactful experience was a two-week study abroad course in India that I took in January 2012 with Arun Gandhi. Eight months after that first trip, I returned to India to continue studying nonviolence at a university that I had discovered while on that first trip with Arun and other SU students. It was on this second trip that I met my wife and where I gained a deep understanding of the practical applications of nonviolence. Without my experience of studying abroad, I’m certain my life would be much different today, so I’m very grateful that SU makes these kinds of trips, tours and courses available to students.”

For more information on the Rezoud Academy, visit www.rezoud.com.