

On April 3rd of 2017, Salisbury University's Department of Conflict Analysis and Dispute Resolution hosted Dr. Mark Umbreit, a professor and the founding Director of the Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking at the University of Minnesota, School of Social Work. This event was part of the Global Lecture Series and the focus was "Restorative Justice: A Social Movement in the Global Community with Increasing Impact." Students had the opportunity to learn from an internally recognized practitioner and scholar with more than forty years of experience as a program administrator, mediator, peacemaker, trainer, teacher, researcher, and author.

Dr. Mark Umbreit began his presentation focusing on how restorative justice has advanced today, in that it is beyond juvenile and criminal justice. Restorative justice is not just school-based, but can be found in faith-communities and work environments. While on small budgets, restorative justice programs consist of huge involvement of community volunteers. Therefore, money is not the driving force of the growing field of restorative justice. International organizations, such as the United Nations and the European Union, now endorse restorative justice.

The speaker then continued to discuss the importance of restorative justice. He noted that restorative justice is about viewing crime and conflict in any situation. This field is about listening with our hearts, not just our heads. Restorative justice also elevates the role of victims, so that its victims are placed at the center and can be involved in developing the ultimate plan. Restorative justice, essentially, humanizes the process and denounces the behavior of people that have offended but doesn't denounce the person. Furthermore, restorative justice creates a safe place for people to dialogue and can be therapeutic.

This lecture was a wonderful opportunity to see what can come from bringing back older wisdom from the indigenous people and then blending such with modern criminal law. So much of what we do is in the name of toughness and is ineffective, but restorative justice can cut through that nonsense in a practical way, not just in an ideological sense. Dr. Mark Umbreit helped university students realize the importance of restorative justice and its applicability in all settings.