



Spring  
Graduation  
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Center Spread

# The Lion's Eye

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## Higher Education for a Higher Purpose: The Role of the Academy in Promoting Social Justice

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"Social justice is fragile," said Jeremy Cohen, Associate Vice President and Senior Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education at Penn State University Park, "and civil respect for other is not something we're born with." His words rang truthfully throughout the Tomezko lounge Saturday, April 24th 2010. In an effort to draw like minds from a variety of disciplines, organizations, institutions, government offices, and backgrounds, Penn State Brandywine held the all-day interdisciplinary symposium entitled "Higher Education for a Higher Purpose: The Role of the Academy in Promoting Social Justice."

Organized by Chair Dr. Cynthia Lightfoot, co-chairs Jeremy Cohen and Sondra Meyers, Senior Fellow for International, Civic, and Cultural Projects at the University of Scranton, among many others, Dr. Lightfoot began the event by reading the remarks of Chancellor Dr. Sophia Wisniewska. A proper introduction was given of the Brandywine campus, mentioning its young age our 42 years old, the youngest in the Penn State family, boasting over 1600 students and note-worthy undergraduate research and international studies programs.

Following her statement, Suraya Pakzad approached the podium after a well-deserved applauding welcome. She is an Afghan Women's Rights Activist, Recipient of the International Women of Courage Award, and Founder of the Voice of Women Organization. In addition to all of her amazing accomplishments, Pakzad is also a mother of 6 children, 3 daughters and 3 sons, and a supportive husband. In the recent past, she has organized numerous "secret" schools for girls in Afghanistan, which were only temporary when the threat of the Taliban approached. Living in this constant fear, the girls would have to burn any books or learning materials "in the oven" so trace of their teachings remained.

"All of the family will gain benefits if the life of the mother is protected," Pakzad said. Soon after the Taliban fell, she and her fellow women went straight to the government for help and then visited jails where women were kept for trying to escape from their abusive husbands.

"They were there because of a true lack of justice," commented Pakzad, and she explained if a women were to run away from a domestic abusive situation and stay with a friend, they were placed in jail, rejected from their family, and shame was placed on the family name. The audience listened in shock and disbelief of the burdens these Afghanistan women carry with them every day with Pakzad being one of them.

In 2005 she created the first women's shelter in Herat, with shelters in five other provinces in Afghanistan. "We need women from all walks of life," she said, "we need women in positions of power, and it's not achieved by talking – if we don't have women leaders, we don't have voices."

"How can we achieve social justice when there is no equality? And there's violence?"

Despite her fighting spirit towards women's empowerment, Pakzad realizes that that women "have to work with men to see benefits, they are the decision-making-people." They need to be educated, especially at a young age about equality towards women. Too, women should work towards obtaining college degrees because without that diploma, it's difficult for anyone to listen to them.

Pakzad hopes to open a satellite office for the Voice of Women organization right in Philadelphia.

After a standing-ovation given to Pakzad once her speech commenced, "A Conversation on Human Rights and Institutional Responsibilities" with moderator Sondra Meyers followed in an adjacent room. The panel for this part of the program consisted of four individuals; Aldo Magazzeni, Founder and Director of Traveling Mercies, Marjorie Margolies, President of Women's Campaign International, Sharon M. Meagher, Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department of Latin American Studies and Women's studies at the University of Scranton, and Trudy Rubin, Editorial

Board and Foreign Affairs Columnist at The Philadelphia Inquirer.

Topics of local and global perspective, student involvement and educational practices, governmental affairs and the media were discussed in depths by the panelists, all of them volunteering their insights from their own experiences in various fields. From Aldo Magazzeni placing an emphasis on becoming active in our own communities first, Trudy Rubin suggesting to have local newspapers more involved in the educational systems, and Sharon Meagher's emphasis on student community and civic engagement and learning, the panel and the audience had much to offer and learn about the issues surrounding human rights.

Following the panel discussion, lunch was



Suraya Pakzad approaches the podium after a well-deserved applauding welcome. She is an Afghan Women's Rights Activist, Recipient of the International Women of Courage Award, and Founder of the Voice of Women Organization. Photo courtesy of Nancy Perone

served and it was Jeremy Cohen who introduced United States Senator Robert P. Casey Jr. The Senator serves on five Senate committees, which include Foreign Relations; Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry; Health, Education, Labor and Pensions; the Special Committee on Aging and the Joint Economic Committee. He is also the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs. Before his election to the Senate, he served as Pennsylvania Treasurer from 2005 to 2006. Casey's priorities in serving the needs of Pennsylvanians are long-term job growth and economic stability, quality health care, and safety at home and abroad.

He thanked Suraya for her courage and astounding achievements in which she provided her insight on. "Thank you for sharing your life with us," Casey said, "and for sharing your wisdom to advocate the voices that you give the women you serve." Senator Casey discussed much about improvements in the government system in seeing changes in inequality, poverty, and people's rights. "There are not enough political officials willing to make political sacrifices," he said. He was pleased to see the symposium occurring on a college campus, "rather than a hotel," to encourage learning and commitment to ideas.

Then, the Senator introduced his wife, Terese Casey, who discussed primarily her involvement with a project entitled "Witnesses to Hunger," which is a collection of photographs taken by mothers living in hunger and poverty with their families, documenting the horrible conditions in which they live. While showing a slideshow of the actual photographs during her presentation, Casey explained that forty women participated in this exhibition and over 1,000 photographs were taken of their homes.

Terese Casey has been working extensively with Professor Mariana Chilton of Drexel University's School of Public Health to promote this inspirational project. Through photographing the run-down homes, lack of food, and uncleanness that these people endure, Casey and Chilton have already begun to change the lives of these mothers through education and awareness. "One in every eight households is affected by hunger in the U.S.," said Casey, and she hopes, through this exhibition, to increase women's participation in hunger issues. The exhibit is now on display at the University of Pennsylvania.

The last formal portion of the day consisted of four concurrent sessions that attendees chose to attend. They consisted of "The Clemente Course: Integrating a Social Justice Agenda in Humanities Curricula" presented by Earl Shorris, Founder of the Clemente Course and Eliza Reilly, Director at the Phillips Museum of Art, "Developing Civic Identity in Youth" presented by Matthew Bundick of Penn State University, Barbara Shaiman of Champions of Caring, and Samuel Loewner also of Penn State University, "Promoting Community Partnerships" presented by Paul Downie of Chester Mural Program, Cynthia Jetter of Swarthmore College, and Joann Weeks of University of Pennsylvania, and finally "Scholarship for Social Justice," presented by Greg Dimitriadis of SUNY Buffalo, Louise Ammentorp of the College of New Jersey, and Eve Tuck of SUNY New Paltz.

Dr. Cynthia Lightfoot and Dr. Phyllis Cole, both professors at Penn State Brandywine, concluded the event with additional thank you's and reflections on what had been learned that day and what everyone would take with them from this inspiring symposium. And this event was not just attended by educators and speakers, but by students as well, who provided their own insight into the day's events.

Junior Steph Tracy, HDFS Major and Civic and Community Engagement Minor, was amazed my Suraya's speech and learned a great deal about women's rights. "I knew that women were not treated fairly in that part of the world but I had no idea that, until recently, it was illegal for them to receive an education," she said. Tracy also plans to apply what she learned from the Higher Education event to her SGA position next semester and her community service involvement. "Now that I am on the executive board for PSU Brandywine's SGA, I am really hoping to get the school engaged in the community. I am hoping that when these ideas are presented, my fellow students will be as eager to get involved and make a difference as I am," commented Tracy. "As Sharon Meagher discussed, civic engagement programs cannot be short term projects. My hope is that the ideas and programs I want to implement, will thrive long after my time at Brandywine."

Rob Ewing, GSA President, also gave his thoughts on the day's events. "You never realize how well off Americans are until you hear of or see someone first hand who fears for their life on a daily basis, just for standing up for what's right," said Ewing. "We have the right to organize in this country and speak freely of whatever we want. I can't imagine having to hold one of our campus diversity sessions underground in fear that a government official would shut us down and jail, or kill us." He also hopes to take what he learned in one of the concurrent sessions and apply it to community service projects, "changing the world one life at a time."