Students in Professor Berni Leidner’s International Justice in the Age of Global Conflict (Psych 391GC) class didn’t only study global conflict. In this Civic Engagement course, Professor Leidner assigned a project that required students to work together to publically share what they learned in the course with others.

The class of 14 advanced psychology majors, who met three times each week, focused one session per week on the project. Together they decided to create an educational exhibit for the campus about the continued genocide in the Sudan.

Boone Gibson, a senior Psychology major at UMass, says that the students’ goal was to use facts and graphic imagery to grab people’s attention and make the situation in the Sudan real. Inspired by a labyrinth about global genocide he saw while studying abroad in Denmark, Gibson shared this idea with the class. Spinning off from this idea, they decided to create a large display to be prominently displayed on the lawn outside Goodell, near the UMass DuBois Library, where their fellow students and others could explore it, “of their own volition and at their own pace.”

Gibson feels that the project fostered a sense of community in the class, as they worked together throughout the semester to decide on each aspect of the project, from what genocide to focus on, to what content to include and how to build the display. They also learned about a variety of related factors, such as working together to gain permission from UMass offices that manage space on campus and working with campus architect, Marty Smith, to meet safety criteria for the display.

Regarding long-term impact, the class hopes that the display will encourage people to further investigate the issue of ongoing genocides globally, point people to experts in the field and encourage people to donate to organizations that are addressing ongoing genocides in Sudan and elsewhere. As for the students in Leidner’s class, many of them shared a newly acquired desire to further explore and educate others about genocide. One student plans to work for the UN, another is interested in working with refugees and yet another hopes to work with returning soldiers who have PTSD.

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