

The Witness Institute Fellowship

Inaugural Cohort



Ross Cohen

After studying poetry and Holocaust testimony at Eckerd College, Ross joined Teach for America at the Texas-Mexico border. There, he kindled his joy of teaching and of encouraging students in discovering their authentic voices in order to tell their stories.

Since 2013, Ross has taught high school English at Columbia Heights Educational Campus in Northwest Washington, DC. He lives with his wife, Priyanka, and their daughter, Meru.

Ross writes, “I teach at a Title I school in Washington, DC. A third of my students are African-American. Two-thirds are Latinx, and many of them are immigrants from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Over a third of my students are English language learners. While many of my students get along well within their demographics, there is little interaction across cultural and linguistic divides. I believe in the power of story to close the gaps between groups. I hope that in sharing and celebrating the differences within our diverse student community, our students’ views of ‘The Others’ in their classes will broaden, as mine have as their teacher.”

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Hope England

Hope England is an activist, comedian, rebel, trauma psychotherapist and non-profit entrepreneur. She's also a pioneer of using improvisational comedy and humor to promote healing, build resilience and help navigate loss for refugees, terminally ill hospitalized youth and traumatized, oppressed communities. She is the founder, CEO, and Chief Laugh Ambassador at Humor for Hope, a Chicago based 501(c)3 that uses improvisational comedy to empower populations coping with the ongoing challenges of trauma, displacement and acute, chronic, and terminal illness.

Hope has a wild love for the world and is a fierce crusader for equality, radical awakened action, and the transformational power of compassion. She has made it her mission to leave this world better than how she found it.

When asked what story she would like people to tell about her, Hope wrote: "I want people to share that through deep compassion, wounded tenderness and outrageous humor, I was someone who helped reintroduce them to our shared humanity and interconnection and reminded them of the healing power of love."

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Joe Haley

Dr. Joseph Haley is a teacher, scholar, and writer based in Washington, DC. He is currently the Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow at the World Justice Project, where he oversees a narrative research and reporting program aimed at promulgating effective practices for advancing the rule of law. He holds a B.A. in literature and creative writing from Eckerd College and a PhD in English from the Johns Hopkins University. During his undergraduate studies, Joe had the tremendous privilege to read great books and explore foundational questions with Professor Wiesel – an experience that helped liberate him from the vestigial extremism of his childhood and cemented a lifelong passion for humane teaching, authentic dialogue, and the universal quest for justice. Before enlarging his focus to include public policy, he spent more than a decade teaching literature and writing at the secondary and postsecondary level; in addition to teaching in the United States, he was a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Malaysia and a science instructor for talented youth in Saudi Arabia. He cares deeply about education as a vehicle for interfaith dialogue and women’s empowerment; during his free time, he serves on the executive board of a nonprofit that provides high quality journalism training to underserved girls in Nepal. He also enjoys creating poetry, making music, hosting friends, and walking with nature.

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Amisha Harding

Amisha Harding is an Atlanta-based entrepreneur who has worked in the areas of nonprofit consulting, real estate and wellness throughout her career. After the murder of George Floyd she took her passionate social media activism to the streets of Atlanta. Her intentional strategy of infusing love, unity, love, and joy into the fight for justice and equality has been a powerful and effective one. On a rainy afternoon in June, that strategy and her relentless commitment to love and joy led to a moment of hope that was seen around the globe when she was able to inspire National Guardsmen and protestors to dance together after days of volatile protests. She continues to protest daily.

Amisha is the proud mother of an 18-year old son, Karis, who attends Morehouse College in Atlanta as an Oprah Winfrey Scholar. He is one of Amisha's main sources of inspiration to continue the fight for equality and justice.

Amisha writes: “My passion is to create spaces for joy and inspiration. People are yearning for joy and sources of inspiration, especially now as we contend with a pandemic, a toxic political climate, and economic uncertainty. I am in my element when I am able to help people move beyond pain and despair to joy and fulfillment.”

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Cheyenne Paris

Cheyenne Paris is finishing an MA in Conflict Resolution and Coexistence and Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, with a concentration in Holocaust education at Brandeis University. She has informally studied Holocaust history for years before attending Brandeis and will now be pursuing a career in Holocaust education. Since starting at Brandeis, Cheyenne has become heavily involved in Holocaust education initiatives in the greater Boston area, including meeting with survivors and speaking out about the dangers of antisemitism. Recently, she traveled with Together, Restoring Their Names as a student fellow to Poland, the Netherlands and Germany, studying public sites of Holocaust education in Europe and hosted a series of book clubs for college students relating to both the Holocaust and social justice.

Cheyenne created a platform called Ally to Activist where she connects college students to discuss issues surrounding social justice, BLM, and antisemitism. Cheyenne is especially interested in looking critically at the current state of Holocaust education, both in America and internationally, and identifying improvements that can be made to keep it relevant for students today. Along with identifying improvements, she wants to integrate Holocaust history into the teaching of current events to help combat antisemitism and discrimination, through teaching and writing curriculum.

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Nicole Starr

Nicole Starr is a District Court Judge in Ramsey County Minnesota. Though she is a general jurisdiction judge, her current assignment is criminal courts and treatment courts. Before her appointment as a judge, Nicole worked as an assistant public defender and was a clerk at the Constitutional Court of South Africa.

Currently, Nicole is also attending seminary at United Theological Seminary. She hopes to better understand how to approach structural inequity, complex moral questions, and attend to the humanity of the people who come into the courtroom. Nicole and her wife are the proud parents of a teenager, two dogs and a cat.

Nicole writes: “I want to rethink criminal justice systems, informed by theories of redemption, racial and social justice, and large ideas that grapple with moral questions; and propose concrete alternatives to a justice system that depends on incarceration as a first line of defense.”

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Juliana Taimoorazy

Juliana Taimoorazy is a leading international advocate, speaker and writer advancing awareness of persecution of Christians in the Middle East. In 2007, Juliana founded the Iraqi Christian Relief Council to shine a light on the plight of Christians in her ancestral homeland. Her own unique story as a refugee has made her a strong leader and an unshakable voice for Christians in the Middle East today. Taimoorazy has advised many U.S. based organizations and institutions on the issue of persecuted Christians in the Middle East, has been consulted on developing policy, has authored many articles and continues to speak globally to raise awareness on these important issues. Through her activism, speaking engagements and regular media appearances, both in the U.S. and internationally, Juliana has tirelessly shared her personal story and promoted the cause of Iraqi Christians throughout the world.

For her tireless service to humanity, Taimoorazy was nominated for the prestigious Nansen Award through the United Nations Higher Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). She has received multiple awards; Assyrian Woman of the Year, Michelle Malkin Investigates “Bulldog Award”, Advocacy of the Year award, just to name a few. Juliana is a UN Delegate in Geneva, and she is a member of the Simon Wiesenthal Midwest Region’s Community Engagement Committee.

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Shaaroni Wong

Shaaroni is a PhD student at the University of Cambridge studying how members of vulnerable populations tell their stories in the contexts of injustice and identity. Whilst doing a Masters in Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at Boston University, she studied with Professor Elie Wiesel, which inspired her to study how people in vulnerable populations interact with injustice and seek identity, justice, and community. Her current research focuses on decolonisation and indigeneity amongst Māori women, and she has worked with minority women, teachers in impoverished areas, and special needs education around the world.

Shaaroni writes: “Born and raised Jewish in Hawai’i, everything I do is with the thought of how to repay or pay forward in the communities that have given me so much. On an island, the need for compassion and dialogue is particularly key because we have nowhere to go when we disagree. Still, I’ve been seeing people grow less willing to really hear other’s stories, especially when those stories challenge our own. I’m honoured and truly humbled to be able to learn with and from a group that is working on compassion and empathy in leadership in Professor Wiesel’s name and excited to be learning from Ariel.”