

## Third Undergraduate Dinner Dialogue

*By Parker Eudy, Rice University '14*

In conjunction with the “Religious Responses to Human Trafficking” event on October 24, several RPLP student fellows organized a dinner dialogue for undergraduates to discuss issues related to human trafficking both in America and abroad. Over dinner on October 30, about eight students from different academic backgrounds discussed their own impressions of the event and thoughts on labor trafficking and sex trafficking. Hosted by RPLP student fellows Melanie Zook, Parker Eudy, and former student fellow Lilly Yu, the event provided a space for undergraduate students to share candidly about the complexity of the issue and, specifically, the difficulties related to reaching affected communities and abolishing human trafficking. The casual format of the dinner dialogue enabled undergraduate students to talk openly about the growing interest and advocacy work around human trafficking and ask questions about how students and other citizens can become more informed and contribute to eradicating bonded and forced labor. In line with RPLP’s mission to facilitate informed dialogue and draw awareness to issues of conflict, students at the dinner dialogue remained inquisitive, respectful, and positive throughout the dialogue.

Similar to the panel discussion event with Kimberly Hoang and Richard Flory, the dinner dialogue covered many topics related to human trafficking. In particular, students discussed the difficulty in defining human

trafficking, recently enacted policy regarding human trafficking, and the impact of advocacy work by religious groups and other institutions. Lilly Yu, who is writing her senior thesis on human trafficking, pointed out that the term “human trafficking” is extremely vague. She cited the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act that broadly defines human trafficking as labor involving force, fraud, and coercion. Another student shared that prior to the event, he typically thought that human trafficking referred to sex work – he had not realized the existence of other forms of labor trafficking that occur daily. One student at the event spent Spring Break 2013 volunteering with religious organizations that provide services to victims of human trafficking in Houston. She recounted her experience and the difficulties in reaching and helping victims. She shared that the most successful organizations are those that take a holistic approach by providing healthcare, childcare, affordable housing, and skills training to victims of human trafficking.

The dinner dialogue concluded with conversation about how students could contribute locally toward ending human trafficking and help those affected. Students mentioned the importance of conducting research to better understand the current realities of trafficking and to inform the public about the complexities of this sensitive issue. Lastly, students acknowledged that advocacy work must focus on the wide variety of obstacles that face victims of human trafficking.