On October 5, Ambassador James McGee, an Indiana University Class of 1977 alumnus, spoke to students of the Global Studies graduate seminar taught by Dr. Hilary Kahn and several human trafficking faculty study group participants about his experience with international anti-trafficking efforts. Ambassador McGee served in the US Foreign Service in 11 countries, most recently as ambassador to Zimbabwe. He described Zimbabwe’s general economic and social decline under President Robert Mugabe, a situation that has led to millions of Zimbabweans seeking work in South Africa. An estimated 100,000 Zimbabweans have been forced into slavery-like conditions on large farms there. The ambassador sees human trafficking as a problem exacerbated by poor governance, but does not claim that the US government—or any other national government—has the capacity to end trafficking wholesale.

Ambassador McGee’s visit culminated with a lively discussion with audience members, who questioned the role that global economic disparities, labor standards, the Western demand for cheap goods, and current immigration legislation play in the trafficking of millions of men, women and children. Ambassador McGee shared his take on the potentially positive contributions of regional bodies (particularly the African Union and others located in the global south), educational opportunities, the cooperation of local leaders (e.g., preachers in rural southern Africa), and a growing awareness of human rights around the world to end human trafficking.