

Alliance to Advance Liberal Arts Colleges (AALAC) - 2017 Workshop Proposal  
**Forced Migration, Displacement and the Question of Social Justice**

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are approximately 60 million refugees worldwide—the largest movement of people since the displacement of millions during and after the Second World War. Vassar faculty and students have been exploring ways in which liberal arts colleges can educate our students and help prepare them for what is one of their generation's major ethical, social and political challenges. We seek to extend this conversation to other campuses.

With the support of AALAC, Vassar, Carleton, Amherst, Williams, Macalester and Swarthmore colleges will hold a two-day workshop to explore development of a cluster of courses, as well as a set of interventional practices, to allow students to engage constructively in this pressing crisis. A new curriculum module would provide a broader historical and moral context for forced migration and displacement. We are interested in asking questions about the history of forced migrations and displacements both *trans-nationally* and *intra-nationally*. We will ask how and whether policies that produce refugees and forced migrations between nation-states are related to policies that produce refugees and migrants within nation-states. How do the policies and conceptual categories of the nation-state, including the “refugee,” contribute to crises of forced migration and displacement? What economic forces and policies contribute to and arise from widespread forced migration and displacement? How do photography, journalism, literature, and other media inform or distort our understanding of migration and displacement? What roles do religious or linguistic differences play in contributing to forced migration and displacement and in efforts to meet the needs of displaced populations?

To seed development of this multidisciplinary curriculum, we plan to share existing syllabi for courses that relate to this issue. We will explore ways in which we can model liberal arts values and commitments to our students to encourage them to become engaged agents of change. Asking students to reflect on and analyze the history of diaspora and case studies in specific contexts is important to make them aware of the complexities involved, the dichotomy of home(s) and hostland(s), the privilege of cultural time/space unity vs. temporal, spatial, linguistic and cultural displacement. How can our planned set of campus course offerings be enriched through existing (or new) study-abroad programs that expose our students to locales where migration crises are playing out? How can we help students develop translingual and transcultural communication skills and religious and cultural understandings necessary to address the needs of a changed world and a globalized community in which conflicts are or should be worked out by people at every level of society? How can we structure these classes to ensure that our students have access to local service and/or experiential learning opportunities, as well as social justice work? For our workshop, to be held at Vassar College in Spring 2017, we will: 1. Develop a robust set of courses and student research projects that could be shared

among us; 2. Identify opportunities for collaboration between the participating schools; and 3. Compile best practices for responsible and ethical student engagement with refugee or migrant populations.

We envision a multi-campus website and digital archive—expanding on one created as a result of a class taught at Vassar on the refugee crisis, and in conjunction with a student-led initiative ([refugeesolidarity.vassar.edu](http://refugeesolidarity.vassar.edu))—to serve as a repository for future student and faculty contributions resulting from our collaboration.

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### **Core Workshop Participants**

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### **Tentative Schedule**

#### **Friday**

6:00 PM Welcome Dinner / Reception

#### **Saturday**

8:00 AM Breakfast

9:00 AM Syllabi review Session 1

10:30 AM Coffee break

11:00 AM Curriculum development Session 2

12:30 PM Lunch

2:00 PM Student projects - Break into Workshops Session 3

3:30 PM Coffee break

4:00 PM Collaborative opportunities - US and Abroad Session 4

7:00 PM Dinner

#### **Sunday**

8:00 AM Breakfast

9:00 AM Best practices/ website development/the way forward Session 5

11:30 AM Wrap-up / Boxed Lunch