

AALAC Proposal: “The Pedagogy of Urgency” (May 2018)

Disruptions of speakers at colleges and universities are not new, but the most recent events highlight a continuing challenge to education and liberal arts education in particular: How can colleges foster spaces capable of holding not just pre-approved “diverse” views but divisive and conflictual arguments? Given the commitment of liberal arts colleges to create “communities of learning” where all members participate in educated dialogue and being educated in turn, how can these communities confront the profound divisions and distrust current in American politics now without silencing conservative voices or disavowing rifts within the predominant liberal ethos?

With the support of AALAC, we propose to explore the development of materials and practices to support what we call “the pedagogy of urgency.” This pedagogy seeks to address the urgent questions of the present, questions that are live and often difficult yet in need of response: historic and ongoing injustices around race, class, sexuality, ability, and other categories of exclusion as well as democratic deficits that have eviscerated citizenship and produced profound political apathy. Developing a pedagogy of urgency, we maintain, involves building confidence as well as crafting techniques that can support learning communities in this work such that all members see themselves as part of a the educational project of learning from disagreement, confronting difference, sustaining ambivalence, and collaborating on strategies to address wicked problems.

As political theorists, we stand in a unique position to engage these issues. Our courses draw from past disagreements to create reflective distance on contemporary questions. Our students want to discuss these questions and turn to us to pursue dialogue. Because of our unique pedagogical position, political theorists can also help other faculty on campus who are both called to serve on panels that address contemporary dilemmas and must address these in their own courses.

In preparation for the workshop, we plan to solicit materials to form an agenda in collaboration with potential participants. Along with some selected readings, this could form the basis for discussions about “best practices” in a roundtable format during our first day of the workshop, pedagogical strategies that can travel not just from college to college but across disciplines and divisions. Our first goal, then, is to create a list of practices for the pedagogy of urgency that speaks to challenges both inside and outside the classroom.

On the second day of the conference, we plan to use these pedagogical strategies to create a workshop that could travel in the future. We envision synthesizing our best practices into a format that participants can then take back to their own campuses, creating a presentation for groups of faculty across disciplines about how to sustain a pedagogy of urgency and thus how to use these urgent questions as pedagogical opportunities rather than “situations” to be managed. Our second goal, then, is to spread the pedagogy of urgency as a way to counter the fear of difficult issues in college classrooms and college campuses and instead to feed the hunger for meaningful, engaged inquiry and reflection.

Workshop Leaders

Ali Aslam, Mount Holyoke College; *aaslam@mtholyoke.edu* (Workshop Liaison)

Joel Schlosser, Bryn Mawr College; *jschlosser@brynmawr.edu*

Potential Participants

Elizabeth Markovits, Mount Holyoke College

Erin Pineda, Smith College

Laura Grattan, Wellesley College

Keegan Callanan, Middlebury College

Heather Poole, Dennison University

Laura Ephraim, Williams College

Sonali Chakravarti, Wesleyan College

Ayten Gundogdu, Barnard College

Ben Berger, Swarthmore College

Craig Borowiak, Haverford College

Paulina Ochoa Espejo, Haverford College

Tamera Metz, Reed College

Preliminary Budget (based on estimate of 10 non-local participants)

Travel costs for participants outside area: \$2105

Lodging costs: \$2325

Food costs: \$1370

Stipend for organizers: \$1000

Total request: \$6800