

Migration Initiative Update

October 26, 2017



Summary: The Global Studies Center (GSC) convened a faculty roundtable on September 22, 2017, to identify new opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration around issues of migration and refugees. We invited participation from faculty whose research and teaching are explicitly concerned with human mobility and displacement. Among those in attendance, there was consensus that a dedicated GSC initiative could usefully facilitate sustained dialogue and coordinate related activities. The enthusiasm for such an initiative underscores the need for ongoing communication and signals the merit of loosely institutionalizing this research community. Concrete first steps discussed include compiling an events calendar, course lists, and faculty biographies, with an eventual goal of establishing a collaborative online forum to regularize the exchange of information and ideas.

Meeting participants

Heath Cabot (Anthropology); Elizabeth Rodriguez Fielder (English); Osea Giuntella (Economics); Lina Insana (French and Italian); Natalie Kouri-Towe (Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies); Dana Moss (Sociology); Lara Putnam (History); Roger Rouse (Global Studies); Taylor Seybolt (Graduate School of Public and International Affairs)

Conveners: Michael Goodhart, Jessica Pickett, Veronica Dristas

Background

Migration is a topic of keen interest to scholars from numerous disciplinary backgrounds. At Pitt, the Global Studies Center (GSC) promotes the interdisciplinary study of transnational processes, emphasizing the connections, divisions, disruptions, inequalities, and productive possibilities these processes engender across time and space. Thus migration is a central concern for the GSC as well, and we have a history of engaging diverse perspective on the topic—e.g., Kabak-endowment sponsored conference, “Moving: Gendered Experiences of Migration, Gentrification, and Displacement” in 2016 and last years’ “Taking Refuge” series on Syrian refugees. More recently, GSC awarded a Global Academic Partnership (GAP) grant to Heath Cabot (Anthropology) for ongoing work on refugees in Greece as an emerging frontier of humanitarian governance.

Building on this momentum, and in response to a canvass of numerous Pitt faculty, GSC is developing a related research initiative on migration to leverage existing opportunities and catalyze new ones. GSC convened a preliminary meeting on Friday, September 22, with an informal group of Pitt faculty

interested in migration and refugee studies to identify the priorities that should shape such an initiative.

Participating faculty's research and teaching situates migration and refugee research across disciplines and regions. Their work interrogates the nature of borders and citizenship as they affect social relationships and access to livelihoods. This transnational lens also creates broad scope for drawing connections between cross-border migration, diasporic communities, foreign policy, humanitarian interventions, and internal displacement within cities or countries. Our aim is not to define migration or migration studies; rather, a GSC initiative will facilitate research collaborations, coordinated speaker series, institutional partnerships, and regular course offerings in related to migration and refugee studies by serving as a central hub or node in this growing network of activity.

Next Steps

In the initial meeting, comments centered on several key opportunities and corresponding challenges. First and foremost, participants expressed the desire to get better acquainted with each other, with an eye toward developing an intellectual community that extends beyond departmental or area studies platforms. Second, they would like to better coordinate course offerings so that their students might similarly benefit from the opportunity to study migration from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Third, they would like to keep abreast of what's happening on campus more broadly; at present, structural compartmentalization means that many people (and new faculty in particular) find out about interesting activities too late for themselves or their students. Fourth, many expressed interest in opportunities to give and receive feedback on each other's research. Finally, they indicated that all of the above point toward a designated institutional "home" or hub for coordinating various events, speakers, courses schedules, and other student resources, as well as administer related funds.

From a practical perspective those emerging priorities and programmatic objectives map to several ways GSC might serve as a platform in the near- and medium-term.

- ***Short-term:*** GSC could coordinate and publicize visiting speakers and related events in conjunction with faculty research or courses (many of which may be co-sponsored with departments and UCIS area studies centers to reach wide audiences). These partnerships may also extend beyond the University of Pittsburgh through formalized institutional partnerships, which GSC is uniquely well situated to administer logically. To ensure that the benefits extend to students, GSC will work with faculty participants and department directors of undergraduate and graduate studies to develop and maintain a list of courses on migration alongside a calendar of related programming. GSC might also help direct students to partner organizations and other available resources (many of which are already listed in our [Global Guide](#)).
- ***Medium-term:*** In addition to guest speakers and other public events, GSC could convene an ongoing migration colloquium series where Pitt faculty can present their own research during brown bag lunches once or twice a semester. GSC will work with participants to develop a format, structure, and guidelines for feedback to ensure the benefits accrue across disciplines. There also seems to be an appetite for less structured face to face opportunities that underpin any intellectual community, and GSC can explore formats to keep this meta-conversation going,

even as we set more concrete plans in motion. In addition to dedicated group discussions, there might be a benefit in a digital communications platform to curate and circulate information to and from faculty to make it readily accessible to internal and external audiences (perhaps including a forum to coordinate calendars and resources). Participants all agreed that biographies and course offerings would be most useful, but differed in their preference for active versus passive information sharing (e.g. emails with headlines, a website where updating information is centralized, or a targeted listserv to discuss courses and other things still in the works). Each of these has different feasibility considerations from GSC's perspective as well.

- **Further reflection and feedback:** We would benefit from further discussion about platforms for internal communication as well as external publications. During the meeting, coordinating contributions to a theme issue of an interdisciplinary journal arose as a possible output from the group. Alternatively, a working paper series might allow greater flexibility to publish in a range of different journals and to shepherd work to final publication. Finally, some ideas came up for doctoral student engagement, such as working groups and other roles in connection with the initiative itself. GSC will explore these possibilities as we revise our graduate certificate requirements (including possible exchange programs).

In the meantime, we hope you will attend the [Humanizing the Global, Globalizing the Human lectures](#); we also encourage you to participate in the associated faculty seminar (please email Veronica at dristas@pitt.edu if you would like to take part). We have tentatively scheduled a first research brown bag lunch at noon on Friday, December 8, featuring Liz Rodriguez Fielder; let us know if you would like to volunteer to present your own work during the spring. GSC has a limited budget to co-sponsor additional events or related research travel on request.

We have begun exploring several options to coordinate these activities and discuss future plans, such as a Facebook group or Blackboard space, and welcome additional suggestions that might minimize duplication of platforms or facilitate easy sharing of existing event pages. Please also add a one-paragraph biography and course details to the [Google Doc](#) we set up as a temporary measure. Finally, if you are sponsoring courses or events related to migration and refugees, please send them to global@pitt.edu with the subject line "migration update," so that we can begin to create a calendar as our website is redeveloped.