

Challenging Borders
Global Liberal Arts Alliance
Grand Challenge for 2015-2017

Program Description

The Global Alliance Grand Challenge program is designed to bring internationalization into the totality of the educational experience through collaborative exploration of a significant issue that is impacting humanity and whose scope spans disciplinary boundaries. By definition, a Grand Challenge is a problem that cannot be solved by unilateral actions or singular approaches; substantial progress in understanding a Grand Challenge requires constructive interaction among governments and/or other international or non-governmental organizations; it requires the consideration of perspectives and interests beyond those that any individual perspective brings to the table. As such, achieving reconciliation and progress on a Grand Challenge requires sustained application of the qualities that liberal arts education seeks to instill in its graduates – including the skills of critical thinking that allow one to approach and analyze an issue from multiple perspectives; the quality of empathy, which evokes compassion for those afflicted by global phenomena; and a capacity for understanding and respecting differences among people of different nations, cultures, ethnicities, and linguistic traditions.

Each year the Global Liberal Arts Alliance will identify a topic of research and teaching as a Grand Challenge. The expectation is that the work devoted to a given Challenge among faculty and students of Alliance institutions will take place over two years.

By design, the first Grand Challenge topic, *Challenging Borders*, is broad, serving as an umbrella topic for a wide range of issues that: invites participation by all academic divisions; are best explored by international interdisciplinary teams; encourages students and faculty to be creative in interpretation; and, will lead to tangible outcomes that bring visibility to participating institutions and the Global Alliance as a whole.

Ways to Collaborate

The goal is for Alliance schools to collaborate on one or more dimensions of the Grand Challenge in ways that bring multiple perspectives to bear and that will lead faculty and students not just to a more global understanding of the topic, but also to the development of productive ways to engage people internationally in the understanding to significant global problems.

Suggestions for ways to collaborate follow. Other ways are possible and faculty members are encouraged to take their ideas to their Alliance Liaison (the list of Alliance Liaisons is at the end of this document).

Themed Courses

A themed course is one that deals with one or more issues related to the Grand Challenge topic. Themed courses need not be from the same discipline; what matters is that they provide different perspectives on one or more aspects of a theme present in both courses that is connected to the Grand Challenge. There are two main ways that faculty members can participate.

Developing Course Material – Two or more faculty members at different institutions collaborate on the development of modules (readings, viewings, taped lectures, assignments, rubrics, and other curated material) for a course related to the Grand Challenge. The modules produced become part of an archive of resources to be used across the Alliance.

Connected Courses – Two or more faculty members at different institutions connect courses they are teaching that touch on Grand Challenge themes. The instructors collaborate in the design of the course (common readings, viewings, and assignments; co-created lectures, and so on), and students and instructors collaborate in its execution (shared lectures, guest lectures, joint student projects, joint student presentations, and so on). Other faculty members with relevant expertise might give video-conferenced guest lectures.

The courses can be tightly coupled, working from a common syllabus with common readings and assignments, or they can be loosely coupled connecting at a set of strategic points in the course where a multinational perspective would provide the greatest impact. The course could be new or an adaption of an existing course.

Courses can use synchronous communication (e.g., shared class sessions, student-student Skype sessions) or asynchronous communication (e.g., through email, forums in a learning management system, Dropbox, Google Drive, or Facebook Group sites).

Speakers

There is a tremendous amount of expertise across the Global Alliance. Faculty members with expertise in an area related to the Grand Challenge topic may share their expertise with other campuses through invited talks (given in person or through video conferencing), class lectures, or recorded talks that become part of an archive of resources. To give a few examples: faculty and students at the American University of Nigeria have been working with Boka Haram refugees; faculty and students at the American University of Beirut have been working with Syrian refugees; faculty and students at BISLA have created programs for Roma.

Webinars

Faculty members with expertise in a dimension of the Grand Challenge might organize a set of papers or a panel discussion that is offered as a webinar. This might be tied to a series of such webinars or to themed courses. A webinar could also be a mechanism for sharing work done by students. Webinars would be archived for future use.

Faculty Research

Faculty members across the Alliance who are working in an area related to the Grand Challenge are encouraged to share their work with each other and, where suitable, to collaborate.

Undergraduate Research

It is also likely that there will be undergraduates who are doing research in areas related to the Grand Challenge. A low cost / high impact opportunity for collaboration is for an undergraduate to supplement the expertise of their home campus with one or more additional mentors from other Alliance schools who have expertise in the area of the student's work (see examples under the "speakers" section above). This could be in the form of email, occasional video calls, recommendations for relevant resources, introductions to other scholars in the field, and reading drafts of papers. At the end of the year these papers could be shared through a *Challenging Borders* web site.

Challenging Borders Example Topics

Participating schools are encouraged to interpret the challenge broadly. A “border” can be geographic, national, religious, generational, environmental, religious, political, cultural, economic, or gender-based. The examples that follow suggest the range of possibilities; many others exist.

Peoples Displaced by Conflict

Conflicts in places such as Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen have forced millions of people to leave home and seek refuge in other communities or countries. The recent flight of families escaping the violence in Syria is but one prominent example. In that case, the volume of people seeking refugee status has tested the unity of the European Union and concerns about national security have had reverberations in other parts of the world where refugees might be resettled. Relevant questions to consider include:

- What are the circumstances or predictors leading to mass migration?
- What are the social, political and economic impacts of a massive influx of refugees for countries that receive them?
- What are consequences for physical and mental well-being for people, especially children, who are fleeing conflict?
- How do countries resettle large numbers of refugees?
- How do refugees from very different cultures and traditions integrate into the local/national culture?
- How do receiving countries address national security concerns?
- What can mathematical models of migration tell us about the routes of migration? How can they help governments make sound policy decisions?
- How can social physics contribute to our understanding of human movement across borders?
- How can business and social entrepreneurship support the integration of diverse ethnic groups in the host societies?
- How can businesses contribute to alleviating the impacts of the refugee crisis through Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives?

Containing the Spread of Infectious Diseases

The largest outbreak of Ebola began in Guinea in 2013, spreading first to neighboring countries and then outside of Africa, causing global concerns about the virus. Efforts to contain it led to travel bans, airport health screenings, closed borders, and traveler quarantines. Travel bans were criticized as being not only unnecessary, but counterproductive. There are now concerns that the recent outbreak of the Zika virus may be a greater threat to global health than Ebola, particularly in its impact on children born with microcephaly. Relevant questions to consider include:

- How do we model the spread of infectious disease?
- How do diseases migrate and change across borders? What are the biological consequences of cross-border spread?
- What are the economic consequences of global outbreaks?
- Can modeling suggest government health policies to avoid, limit, or contain disease?
- What obligations do more developed countries have to assist developing nations deal with disease?

- What factors contribute to the spread of a disease?
- How should pharmaceutical companies be involved?
- How do we determine the human cost of disease, particularly how it will affect a country over a long period of time?
- How do we use visual culture to explain disease to those susceptible and to a global audience?
- What impact do local perceptions of disease, treatment, and medicine have on containment and treatment?
- Are there lessons learned from the 2013-15 Ebola outbreaks applicable to responding to the Zika virus?

Borders and Identity

As new populations enter a country, driven by persecution, fear in the presence of war, the search for economic opportunity, or flight from disease, they bring change to the countries where they arrive. Part of the response from citizens of a nation that receives large numbers of immigrants is a concern about the continued identity and culture of their homeland. The issues surrounding identity can center on a wide range of dimensions of difference between the resident population and the new arrivals. Relevant questions to consider include:

- What elements can contribute to the success of creating cultural hybridity between a receiving nation and its immigrants?
- How does the experience of different ethnic groups compare to those of the dominant population of an immigrant nation – in terms of socio-economic status, as well as in such things as mixed loyalties, civic participation, voting, taxation, or legal jurisdiction?
- What role does religion have in assuaging or exacerbating the response given to a migrant population?
- When different cultures come into contact, what happens to language? How do differences in language affect the experience of those who cross borders in search of a better life?
- What models exist among nations for according respect and fair treatment to immigrants of different ethnicities, cultures, language, and religion? How do nations compare with respect to these goals?
- As a result of culture contact, what happens to one's sense of place and identity? How can we study issues related to belongingness during forced migration?

Displacement by Climate Change and Natural Disaster

A key motivation for those who depart one setting in search of another is that their former habitat no longer provides a sustainable means of existence. Whether it is through flooding, desertification, pollution from human sources, or other forms of disaster, changes in the natural environment contribute to the displacement of peoples in search of better living circumstances. The physical sciences in particular have a key role in furthering the understanding of natural forces contributing to the displacement and migration of peoples in different parts of the world. Relevant questions to consider include:

- In what ways is climate change affecting the migration of peoples to different settings? Can we correlate changes in the climate to increased migration or vice versa?
- Conversely, what is the impact of migration on available environmental resources? What are the causes for the growth of invasive species?

- In terms of a population's access to resources, what are the natural resources in which growing scarcity is causing people to migrate to a different place?
- Are there indications in the scientific data to support the premise that natural disasters and other changes (acid rain, toxic pollution, or expired aquifers) will cause growing damage to the natural environment, yielding a greater displacement of populations at risk in certain regions?
- Are there benefits to climate change that can offset the evident disruption experienced by those in affected regions?
- A change in residence, due to either changes in climate or forced migration, can have an impact on our sense of place and identity. What are the psychological consequences of such relocation? What is the relation between climate change and mental health?

Divided Cities

Mass migration accentuates differences, and the tension that can arise between a resident population and immigrant communities can become more pronounced in places where the two are brought into close interaction. In the larger context of nations, attempts can be seen to bridge borders through acts of cooperation that have both symbolic and economic value to participant nations; examples are the Pan-Islamic, the Pan-African, the European Union, and other monetary unions. In the more closely confined space of an urban region, however, the issue often presents itself as one of security, as a means of separating one population from another. Relevant questions to consider include:

- What are the characteristics of urban settings that gain the designation of a Global City? What steps have such cities taken in terms of inclusiveness, the stewardship of resources, the creation of fair-minded public institutions and laws that make them accepting to populations of different backgrounds?
- In what ways does the concept of security come to the fore in cities that are more divided and less resolved in character? What kinds of emphasis are given to population security, food security, resource security, shelter, and national security? How does the implementation of policies concerning such elements of security affect immigrant populations?
- How do acts of terrorism affect the sense of security in a region, including densely populated urban centers?

Economic Factors

Economics are often a central factor in the decision to migrate across borders, leaving behind a former homeland to seek better opportunity in places unknown. Crossing into another country in search of work and income may be done legally through certain visa provisions, or it may be done under cover in hopes of securing longer-term footing in a more promising future. Beyond the economics of the individual migrant are larger factors that define the landscape of opportunity for those of different countries. Often the disparity between the economic prospects of nations that share borders becomes a powerful incentive to migrate regardless of risk. Relevant questions to consider include:

- What are the economic effects of labor migration for nation that imports (or otherwise gains) workers who migrate from other countries?

- How does labor migration affect the economy of a nation from which large numbers of people cross the border in search of work?
- What role do the fluctuating values of currency and shifts in labor markets have in triggering migration?
- What should be the responsibilities of nations that share borders in alleviating poverty?
- What computational models can we devise that predict the economic consequences of migration?

The Roles of Government

Migration often stems directly from the actions – or inactions – of governments in sustaining the security and well-being of its citizenry. A government that neglects the basic needs of its people, all but ensures that the social bonds among families, the strengths of its institutions, and the fabric of society will deteriorate. Governments have a strong influence on the actions of their citizens, whether to remain within the homeland or migrate to another future. There is also an important role for supranational organizations and institutions, such as the United Nations and the European Union. Relevant questions to consider include:

- What lessons can be learned from the example of failed states that have given rise to mass migration to other places?
- In what ways have the mass migrations of the current age given rise to new conceptions of citizenship?
- How have these new conceptualizations of citizenship affect one's individual sense of ethnic identity?
- What role has corruption played, within government or among powerful agents whom government tolerates (i.e. in the sex trade, gun trade, drug trade, international crime) in causing the disenfranchised to flee a nation?
- What should be the role of government in meeting the challenges of urban settings where mass immigration has occurred – including the challenges of providing housing, transportation, access to government services, and access to education?
- How do peoples displacement affect the relations of affected nations?
- What is the role of international organizations, such as the United Nations, in dealing with peoples displacement and refugee crises?
- How does the European Union deal with the Syrian refugee crisis and to what extent does the crisis threaten the solidarity among EU member states?

Some financial support for projects and programs related to Grand Challenges is available through various Alliance funding sources (e.g., Global Course Connections, Global Scholar, and Inter-institutional Visits). Check with your Alliance Liaison to learn about other opportunities and how to apply.

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