



**SEEKING REFUGE:  
FAITH-BASED APPROACHES  
TO FORCED MIGRATION**

Poverty and Peacemaking II  
March 3–4, 2017 at Princeton University

## What is the Just University? Responding to Forced Migration

Stanley Katz, Princeton University (Moderator)  
Patrick Barry, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Camden  
Mark Justad, Every Campus a Refuge/Guilford College  
Dennis McAuliffe, Georgetown University  
Marissa Rosenberg-Carlson, Princeton University (Student Rapporteur)

*a) Professor Katz*

I think it would be very useful for every university to ask itself: what is the concept of a just university?

Princeton is not a university in which political activism has ever been at the forefront. For the past 15 years, the Pace Center for Civil Engagement has sponsored this kind of activism, but this is recent – after Ralph Nader '55 challenged his classmates to raise money to encourage students in the direction of civic engagement. But Princeton is dominated by disciplinary departments, not multidisciplinary approaches. So how might we implement a broader approach to the refugee crisis?

*b) Patrick Barry, Director of Refugee and Immigration Services, Catholic Charities – Diocese of Camden*

- Son of Cambodian refugee
- Interpreter for his Cambodian grandparents in the U.S.

We connect with local universities like Temple, Rutgers, Princeton. We arrange events for refugees – we threw a refugee carnival, we have volunteers who meet with refugee families. We host a World Refugee Day celebration. Overall, we're only as successful as the community that supports us. The refugee resettlement program will fall apart without community support, but since November I've gotten more donations than I've gotten in the past year and a half.

*c) Mark Justad, Director of Center for Principled Problem Solving, Guilford College*

- Background in religious studies, PhD in theology from divinity school
- Guilford is a Quaker small liberal arts school, nonreligious but holds Quaker values of “tolerance”
- Co-created Every Campus a Refuge to respond to contemporary refugee crisis



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It never occurred to me that a university wouldn't be just. Because I'm a preacher's son, the notion of integrating the pragmatic and ideal has always been in my mind. The divinity schools I was part of were often seen as the conscience of the university in a funny way. So my academics have always been wrapped up in aspirational thought. I had this idea that education was a moral impulse, and could reflect an intrinsic capacity for social good.

Guilford College is a small Quaker liberal arts college in Greensboro, NC, whose administration has just begun to speak out on political issues – i.e. against North Carolina's HB2 "bathroom bill." Quakerism promotes tolerance.

Nine years ago, we founded the Center for Principled Problem Solving, through which we try to put values to work in the world. So we've been doing refugee work through that. My colleague Diya Abdo founded Every Campus a Refuge, which encourages campuses to become sanctuaries for refugees ([everycampusarefuge.weebly.com](http://everycampusarefuge.weebly.com)). Professor Abdo is a Palestinian refugee, and instead of being demoralized she said, "What can we do? I'm used to having to work my way through things." Another colleague, Jennie Knight, teamed up with our local Church World Service agency to start orienting students and faculty to help with refugee resettlement services.

Many campuses have resources that would allow us to respond to this crisis in a way that draws campus communities into dialogue on an important issue. We've helped families resettle – the first family arrived nine months ago, and we provide each family a three-month window of free housing and support from the campus. The fifth family arrived last weekend. This is an example of "not thinking about it too much. We see a need, identify our resources, and find a way to address it.

Our outreach has a clear educational component, and it must reflect nature of the college. We don't need to duplicate other organizations doing this work. We now have a two-year minor in forced migration and refugee resettlement, with twenty-five students so far.

*d) Dennis McAuliffe, Associate Professor of Italian, Founder of John Main Center for Meditation and Inter-Religious Dialogue, Georgetown University*

- Meditation center teaches meditation also to people beyond campus, i.e. in refugee programs

We have a myriad of programs at Georgetown, including the Institute for the Study of International Migration (where students can obtain a certificate in refugees and humanitarian emergencies); the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs; the John Main Center for Meditation and Inter-Religious Dialogue; as well as local parishes and student-run refugee projects such as No Lost Generation, which promotes education, protection and support for adolescent and youth affected by the global forced migration crisis. We also partner with organizations outside the university to help refugees from the MENA region prepare for jobs.



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Regarding meditation, though – meditation is a universal practice. It’s everywhere, in all religious traditions and also in non-religious traditions. We know that religiousness and spirituality are very important to most people in the world, maybe not as much in the U.S., but for 85% of people in the world, religion is very important. Particularly for refugees whose brokenness is so evident in their own lives – their faith can’t always deal with it. They lose meaning. They’re searching for something they thought they had before this brokenness got to them. This makes our job challenging, but necessary. Because meditation is present in all traditions, we can help them to be together in a practice. It’s very practical. It takes the attention off themselves and puts it on something else. The divine, the meaning they’re looking for, the unknown... that’s how we justify making the gift of meditation available to refugees. And for the people who run refugee programs, they need to take care of themselves, too. So we teach meditation to these caregivers as well. It has to be comprehensive and ongoing.

### Roundtable Discussion

*Professor Katz*

These institutional speakers are in faith-based organizations. But higher education in this country is primarily secular – scientifically, the ideal is not morality. It’s easier to conceptualize this problem if you come from a faith-based institution that professes a set of values. At Princeton, we engage in the scientific pursuit of truth. This is a wildly pluralistic society, there’s no reason to think here that there’s any consensus on values.

This composes a constraint on moral action by an education institution itself. This is a characteristic problem for most universities like this. How do you agree on value specification or action in a community that has no previously existing consensus on what values are?

That’s why Matthew Weiner – and not the Vice President of Student Affairs – organized this conference.

When I was an undergrad at Harvard “a thousand years ago,” the university hired a new deeply religious president. He reinstalled the cross on the altar in the chapel, and declared that only Christian marriages could take place in the chapel. Faculty members were outraged. At the end of freshman year there was a march from the chapel to the president’s office. More than a thousand faculty members marched, and they got their way.

*Maria Hoehn, Vassar faculty*

I disagree with the idea that there’s no impetus on secular campuses. At Vassar, it was the secular students who reached out to faith-based communities to start these initiatives. We have to really



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think – who’s with us, who’s against us. They might not be who we expect. At Vassar, we work in a town that has Trump supporters, even people who support the refugee ban. But some are still involved with religious charities. So there’s a much more complicated constellation of perspectives.

*Tahir Zaman, SOAS lecturer*

SOAS has a history very much tied into colonialism, and the empire struck back and now the children of the empire make up the large part of the student body. The institution is secular, and the students are driving a large part of the political question.

We have a lot of activism in general, like Justice4Cleaners. Student organizers put pressure on the university hierarchy to give custodians a living wage, give them proper contracts. These issues are like a seamless garment – these problems are all interconnected. In addition, we need to have a sanctuary scholarship – and the students are pushing the university to respond in that way. They understand that these struggles are interconnected.

*Karen Emmerich, Princeton faculty*

Let’s think about civic engagement vs. education and research; all of the things happening at Princeton are “in addition to” whatever our educational impulse is. One of the convos happening a lot in civic engagement community is how to fold that into an educational program and research agenda so that these things are not competing for someone’s time. That seems like a primary concern, and it also garners a lot of pushback.

*Community member*

I’m going to push back on these thoughts about secularity and religious communities. The secular mindset defeats itself when it closes itself to the religious orientation. When we look at the refugee crisis, we create good learning opportunities. But for me as an academic administrator I have a hope that the highest intellectual investment can be that we move out of this box that is way too pragmatic.

*Chelsea Langston Bombino, Center for Public Justice*

We are, though, in institutions that reinforce obligations to the stranger, and implicate students with sense of civic engagement. But are we in an echo chamber? I think it’s important to make an argument to conservative communities, like in the rust belt.



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*Professor Katz*

The whole idea of service as the purpose of education is new and skin-deep at this point. So we need to reflect on how to grow that.

*Essma Bengabsia, NYU student*

From an activist perspective, a lot of this is theoretical. How you think our organizing as students can be implemented without administration pushback? At NYU, one of our main trustees is on Trump's Economic Advisory Board - this has made it difficult to push for a sanctuary campus.

*Veda Jamoona, Maharishi University of Management student*

I'm in the rust belt - Fairfield, IA - and we had a town hall meeting, and we're in a very different place than people in Princeton, NJ are. We're really just trying to let people know that we're all of the same nervous system, we're not that different, and it's a much more basic process of getting a largely white, Protestant community to feel empathy for Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

*Michael Klein, New Jersey Association of State Colleges*

The phrase sanctuary campus won't get you anywhere. Jan Napolitano over at the UCs won't use it. It has emotional power behind it, but it doesn't have legal meaning. Harvard Law students put a comprehensive document together about the legal agreements that can be made - but that's not one of them.

*Jonathan Golden, Drew University faculty*

Going off that, there's an idea around my community that the worst thing you can do is to call yourself a sanctuary because then ICE knows where to come. I also think, when I speak to people in law enforcement as to why they should help these refugees, that we don't need to make one single argument that's universally palatable to everyone. Everyone has their own self-interests and reasons for acting. Black people say, "We've been living this for 300 years." Latino folks say, "We're worried about getting our doors kicked down." We can connect with people from different angles.

*Justad*

Again, what is a just university? The notion that a university could claim to be just and say that it's neutral and doesn't have values - that doesn't hold water anymore. We all know that universities have and perpetrate values. Who gets to participate?



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*Zaman*

In Britain the cost of education has gone through the roof, so the problem is – how do people get involved in social justice action when it takes away from their education?

*Katz*

President Obama saw education as a jobs creator. What’s the justification for a liberal education, a training of the mind and citizenship? I don’t think it’s so clear that there’s broad-based public support for that now.

*Zaman*

Exactly. SOAS had a migrant day of action, walked out of class and marched to a square. And people were yelling, “Students, get a job!”

*Community member*

Can we really talk about integrating? I’m teaching a class on sustainability, climate change. The fundamental question is – how do values integrate? Can these be embedded in every course – how do we apply them in every context?

*Katz*

My own proposition to folks in secular universities is to think – what can you do to challenge your university to specify what its values are? If it’s not a school-to-job pipeline, what is it? How do we articulate these values, practically?

*Some of the notes taken by student rapporteurs were submitted as rough notes from the session rather than as a polished summary.*