
Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One planning Template

- 1. Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

While 3.5 percent of the world's population is living in a country other than their country of birth (United Nations), nearly 14 percent of the U.S. population is foreign born (Pew Research Center, 2020). If we include the children of the foreign born, 26 percent of the U.S. population is either an immigrant or the child of immigrants (Current Population Survey, 2020). Immigration has most decidedly touched on the U. S. population and it is high time that WMU offers a major that is dedicated to the issues surrounding immigration.

The problems that an interdisciplinary program on global migration and refugee studies would tackle are varied. I elaborate on just a few.

- How to accommodate the stateless, an ever-growing population (e.g. the Rohingya in Myanmar and surrounding countries; Haitian descendants made stateless in the Dominican Republic due to a rewriting of the constitution; widespread statelessness on the African continent due to conflicts in nationality law and challenges involving birth registration systems.
- Climate change refugees require solutions forged by environmental scientists, immigration law experts, sociologist, and disciplines that work with immigrant adaptations.
- How can we harness the most out of remittances, the money that immigrant workers send back to their families in their home countries? Can we devise better payment methods to reduce remitting fees and tackle the problem of being unbanked, which falls disproportionately on immigrants?

- 2. Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

The subject of immigration is decidedly interdisciplinary, requiring the expertise of sociologist, economists, demographers, historians, political scientists, geographers, public health specialists, business law experts and immigration law experts, as well as individuals steeped in environmental studies (climate change refugees), scholars of African American and African Studies and the Lewis Walker Institute for Race and Ethnic Relations (the legacies of forced migration), English and foreign language literature specialists (literary contributions of refugees, immigrants and their children), education specialists (special needs of immigrant children), computer scientists and statistician to organize and find relationships with vast amounts of information, with this being a non-exhaustive list.

The global and international studies program proposes to house this major following the model used to offer the BA in global and international studies. A global migration and refugee studies major can be developed where students are required to complete:

- the GIST introductory course and the GIST capstone courses – with the later requiring students to pull together their understanding of immigration and refugee studies in a research project;
- selected courses across the disciplines that deal with migration and refugee issue;
- Rigorous foreign language instruction to the 3000-level;
- Two service learning internships --one that takes advantage of the wealth of agencies around us that cater to refugees and to immigrant adaptations and assimilation and a second internship that takes place abroad revolving around a refugee camp experience.

- 3. Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

This major will enhance our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. A large share of recent immigrants into the U.S. are of race/ethnicity that have traditionally been disadvantaged (e.g. immigrants from Central America, the African continent, and the Middle East.) As a share of state population, Michigan houses the largest Arab-American community in the U.S. (<https://www.prb.org/>). Kalamazoo and surrounding communities have, traditionally been an important refugee resettlement community, in part due to its solid community infrastructure around refugee resettlement , e.g. Kalamazoo Refugee Resource Collaborative, Samaritas, Bethany Christian Services. Our student RSO, Refugee Outreach Collective at WMU, collaborates with these agencies. The cluster of immigrant-serving agencies in our area goes beyond servicing refugees, e.g. the Concilio (formally Hispanic-American Council), Immigration Assistance Program, and Michigan Immigrant Rights Center.

Our students have demonstrated an enduring commitment to immigrants in our community. Not only do we observe a good cluster of students interning in the refugee agencies in town but we can also point to recent student-led and student-conceived study abroad activities where students collaborate with agencies delivering services to refugees in India and Lesbos, Greece. This suggests that the major in Global Migration and Refugee studies may draw in new students from outside the university if our students demonstrated commitments are typical of student interest in general. It is also noteworthy that there is a scarcity of such programs. While some institutions offer minors in migration studies, the vast majority of immigrant/refugee programs are at the master-level. We have an opportunity to serve as a leader by offering a full undergraduate major program here with little risk since the major would use most of the infrastructure of the global and international studies program.

- 4. Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

Gathering researchers and scholars around the topic of immigration and refugee studies is likely to create new collaborative research. Migration scholars are scattered through-out the university and this would provide an “area” for them to gather and collaborate while remaining in home disciplines. Individuals with expertise in international migration, immigrant adaptations, and refugee scholars are currently housed in sociology (Ann Miles and Chien-Juh

Gu), Economics (Susan Pozo, Debasri Mukherjee), Anthropology (Elise DeCamp); Global and International Studies (Marcela Mendoza); World Languages and Literatures (Vincent DesRoches); Comparative Religion (Alisa Perkins); Spanish (Kristina Wirtz, Mercedes Turbino-Blanco, Pablo Pastrana). The literature of the diaspora with scholars in IIAS (Mariam Konate) Experts from the Colleges of Education and Health and Human Services could also potentially contribute to this community of scholars. Given the push for interdisciplinary research at funding agencies and given that immigration is one of the top legislative priorities of the new administration, there are likely to be more opportunities to seek funding on immigration and refugee topics.

- 5. Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

The major in international migration and refugee studies, will result in increased efficiencies in the same way that the BA in global and international studies does. With the exception of the introductory and capstone senior class (shared with the GIST major) all of the other courses for the major are housed in units all through-out the university with students building their program of study by selecting seats that are “left over” from classes that do not fill -- using up the university’s excess capacity. Offering this major dedicated to global migration and refugee studies, moves us toward greater efficiencies at the university by taking up seats in classes that would otherwise be wasted.

- 6. Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

No additional courses need to be taught. GIST 2000, 4900 and 4980 will serve as the introductory, capstone and internship courses, respectively. GIST 4900 and 4980, intended to supervise individualized research and internship experiences, will accommodate the migration students who will be required to complete one stateside internship and one international service-learning experience involving refugees. At least 13 courses from around the university that deal extensively with international migration and immigrant adaptations would be appropriate to satisfy the 5 or 6 electives that students will be required to take. These are LWIR 3000 - Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in the U.S.; ANTH 3580 - The African Diaspora: Across the Americas; HIST 3702 - Colonial Latin America (WI); ECON 3210 - The Economics of Immigration; HIST 3882 - History of Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade (WI); REL 2065 - Islam in America; SOC 2100 - Modern Social Problems; PADM 5880 - Culture, Diversity, and Social Equity; HIST 2030 - World History since 1500; REL 3165 - Religion and Globalization; AAAS 2100 - Comparative Approaches to Forms of Black Consciousness; HISP 2650 - Hispanic Culture in the U.S.; HISP 2750 - Latino Writing/Latino Culture. In addition, many topics classes often revolve around themes of immigration and would serve as suitable selections too. A study-abroad experience surrounding refugees has recently been offered. The language cognate can be satisfied in the language of choice of the student. Given the cross disciplinary nature of the GIST major and the existence of flexible individualized core classes for GIST students, there will be no need produce new classes to run this program. The infrastructure for internships and service learning is already in place.

- 7. Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

The plight of immigrant and refugee communities is an area that raises passions in our students, faculty, and administrators/staff whether that revolve around the rights and ability of DACA students, the integration of immigrants and their children, recent executive actions concerning refugees, tensions that arise by the use of immigrants as scapegoats for the failure of the economy. These topics and more are at the forefront of student discussions. Our students are already passionately engaged in refugee resettlement activities around Kalamazoo and abroad. This is a low risk but high impact project. WMU can boast to be a leader in providing this unique programming at the undergraduate level.

8. Contact

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