



CHALLENGING BORDERS

International Human Rights Conference

April 30 - May 2, 2023
Albion College

Conference Outcome Document

Prepared by Carrie Booth Walling & Kara Anderson
June 2023

From April 30th to May 2nd, 2023, Albion College welcomed faculty, students and practitioners who traveled from 9 countries and 3 American states representing 18 colleges and universities for an international human rights conference. Our goal was to challenge borders literal and symbolic in the field of human rights and to build cross-campus connections. Presenters addressed four themes: climate, identity rights, labor rights and refugee & migrant rights. The event engaged more than 100 people across 3 days including 45 students. We shared research, strategized advocacy tactics, explored the power of experiential learning, engaged the arts, and celebrated the joy that comes from building a community in pursuit of justice.

Purpose and goals:

The conference had 5 goals: 1) sharing cutting-edge scholarship; 2) strengthening the skills of the next generation of human rights leaders; 3) developing human rights pedagogy; 4) building relationships among teacher-scholars (and students with their peers); and 5) jump-starting cross-campus collaborations on human rights programming across Great Lakes College Association (GLCA) and Global Liberal Arts Alliance

(GLAA) institutions. We hoped that participants would leave the conference with an increased awareness of human rights policy and advocacy strategies and stronger cross-campus connections among faculty, students, and staff working in the areas of human rights and social justice within the GLCA/GLAA community. Post conference survey results suggest that we met these goals.

Sixty-four percent of conference attendees participated in the post-conference evaluation. Of these, 87% of respondents said that they were either likely (33%) or very likely (54%) to engage in other GLCA and GLAA cross-campus collaborative programming. 90% of respondents agreed that they established new connections and relationships (63% strongly agreed and 27% agreed). Over half of the respondents identified connecting and interacting with people around the world and forming deeper bonds with peers and colleagues from other institutions as the most enjoyable aspect of the conference. 89% of respondents reported that the conference strengthened their research, communication, and/or advocacy skills. And one of the most consistent pieces of feedback we received was significant appreciation for student involvement in the conference – as true contributors. 96% of respondents either agreed (17%) or strongly agreed (79%) that “active student participation enriched the conference experience.”



Conference Funding:

We are so thankful for the financial support that made this event possible. Support for the Challenging Borders International Human Rights Conference was provided by the Great Lakes Colleges Association as part of its Global Crossroads Initiative, made possible by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Albion Human Rights Lab:

The Albion Human Rights Lab, a special project of the Gerald R. Ford Institute for Leadership in Public Policy and Service, served as the organizers and hosts of the Challenging Borders conference. Created in Fall 2021, the Human Rights Lab is an interdisciplinary learning lab composed of undergraduate students at Albion College. The Human Rights Lab strives to bridge the gap between theory and practice by showing how research and advocacy can be used to reduce inequality and increase access to rights and justice. The Lab prioritizes experiential learning and community building to engage students and community partners in generating solutions to human rights and social justice problems – these themes were incorporated into the conference. The Lab links the local with the global, revealing the interconnectedness of human rights and operates three core projects – 1) an advocacy toolkit to help students and community members achieve their justice goals, 2) community partnerships to address shared problems, and 3) human rights co-curricular programming focused on awareness, human rights education and training.

Carrie Booth Walling, the Director of the Lab and Faculty Director of the Ford Institute served as the main conference organizer with support from Cristen Casey (Director, Center for International Education) and Nancy Chapman (Director of Camps and Conference) as co-organizers focused on travel support for international attendees, and food and lodging respectively. Jacqueline McAllister, Associate Professor of Political Science at Kenyon College was an intellectual partner in program planning. The student members of Human Rights Lab, led by Albion College student Kara Anderson, organized 4 conference activities – an opening icebreaker for participants to get to know one another, a networking lunch to build community, a human rights advocacy workshop that encouraged participants to see the connections between human rights and local justice problems, and the student poster session.

Conference Participants:

The Challenging Borders conference hosted more than 100 faculty, students, staff, community members, and practitioners. Participants represented 18 colleges and universities in 9 countries (Bulgaria, France, Italy, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom) and 3 American states (Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio) with an even wider diversity of nationalities. Participants represented the following 14 GLCA and GLAA institutions:

- Albion College
- Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane

- American University in Bulgaria
- American University in Nigeria
- American University of Paris
- Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts
- College of Wooster
- Denison University
- DePauw University
- Earlham College
- Forman Christian College
- John Cabot University
- Kenyon College
- Oberlin College

Four other academic institutions were also represented: Covenant University of Nigeria, the School for International Training, London School of Economics, and Utrecht University.

Summary of Conference Proceedings

Throughout the conference, undergraduate students from Albion College and Kenyon College attended and took notes on program sessions. We invited them to collaborate in teams to identify and summarize session themes, paying particular attention to what the session suggested about how we might challenge borders in how we might define, think about, advocate for, and/or study human rights. The following summary of conference proceedings represents the joint effort of: Emily Abramczyk (Albion), Kara Anderson (Albion), Isaac Byrd (Albion), Ali Dakroub (Albion), Sabrina Fitzgerald (Albion), Ben Gruodis-Gimbel (Kenyon), James Henderon (Kenyon), Kevie Lamour (Albion), Sheridan Leinbach (Albion), Karsen Mellado (Albion), Ashlyn Reed (Albion), and Sally Smith (Kenyon).

A complete conference program can be found in the Appendix of this document.

Sunday, April 30	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	Keynote: The Revolution will not be Litigated	Katie Redford, Esq
------------------	-------------------	---	--------------------

Katie Redford Esq, Executive Director of the Equation Campaign, served as the opening keynote speaker. Redford’s keynote address was open to the public and well attended with almost 100 attendees. Her talk was titled, “The Revolution will not be Litigated: Movements for Human Rights and Climate Justice,” and her core message of rights advocates needing to connect the head, the heart, and hands in human rights and climate justice advocacy became a theme of the conference. Other key ideas included:

- Fossil fuel corporations are the greatest threat to the environmental crisis. And although they hold a significant amount of power, society needs to use their evidence, resources, technology, and the power of movements to act now before it is too late.
- Climate change poses one of the largest threats, and global injustice is at an all-time high. While the legal system sometimes works, we don't have time to wait for the legal system or the "arc of history." We need to adopt more radical strategies including civil disobedience.
- In particular, we need to join and channel resources to the movements of frontline communities - they will fight the hardest, because they are most threatened.
- Grassroots movements through personal experiences and stories are one of the most effective ways to implement environmental and human rights changes.
- The law should not be used to tinker or make small changes to the current system, but rather to disrupt, dismantle, and reform the power of corporations that are causing environmental degradation and human rights abuses.
- In the U.S. we have enormous privilege (including the ability to make our voices heard in politics and resources) which we can use to elevate the voices of those who don't.

Academic Panels

The conference hosted four academic panels and 2 scholarly research presentations. The academic panels focused on migration and gender, intersectionality and the environment, human rights narratives, and intersections between globalization, health and the environment. Two panels included presentations by faculty-student combined research teams from John Cabot University, DePauw University, American University in Nigeria, Denison University, Forman Christian College, and the American University in Bulgaria.

Monday, May 1	10:30 AM - 12:00 PM	Academic Panel 1: Intersectionality & the Environment
---------------	---------------------	--

Key ideas from this session included:

- Climate change is linked and will exacerbate several other human rights issues by forcing migration, reducing the availability of resources, and driving conflict.
- Climate change has perpetuated and expanded modern slavery, and there is little to no domestic or international legislation protecting climate displaced persons and refugees from modern slavery, including sex trafficking, human trafficking, and forced/unpaid labor.

- Climate change impacts everyone, but has substantial direct and indirect effects on women and reproductive health.
- Something needs to be done/it needs to be addressed; but solutions must be flexible, culturally sensitive, innovative, sustainable, and multisectoral and integrated. Women must be at the center of addressing these concerns.

Monday, May 1	10:30 AM - 12:00 PM	Academic Panel 2: Migration & Gender
---------------	---------------------	---

Key ideas from this session included:

- Beyond being a geographical concept, borders can be social, political, and cultural places that play a major role in the implementation of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of exclusion.
- Women and children face additional dangers when it comes to migration, such as rape, abuse, and human trafficking.
- Islam provides women with rights and protections, but they face challenges and obstacles for which a more critical and nuanced approach to Islamic texts and traditions needs to be followed that takes into account the diversity of Muslim communities around the world.
- Addressing mental health for refugees and asylum seekers is as important as protecting the mental health of volunteers of Human Rights Organizations. Some ways that the “Europe Must Act” organization does that is through yoga and sports.

Tuesday, May 2	10:45 AM - 12:15 PM	Academic Panel 3: Intersections between Globalization, Health & the Environment
----------------	---------------------	--

Key ideas from this session included:

- The public has the right to health and the state has the responsibility to fight against threats to public health. But in the case of some Northeast African countries, governments have used the Covid-19 pandemic as an excuse to violate human rights and give birth to new dictatorships.
- Globalization has brought about many positive changes, but also negative consequences for the enjoyment of human rights, especially for migrant workers.

Economic, social, and cultural rights have often been neglected in the context of globalization, which creates new threats for our diverse world.

- Dalit is a group of communities which has historically been politically excluded, economically deprived, socio-culturally discriminated against and treated as “untouchables.” They are equally deserving of their rights.

Tuesday, May 2	10:45 AM - 12:15 PM	Academic Panel 3: Human Rights Stories
----------------	---------------------	--

Key ideas from this session included:

- Stories are an important part of understanding human rights issues. People in societies tend to overgeneralize and not get the full picture; stories help to fill in the blanks.
- Stories and understandings of them have worked both for and against human rights. Different understandings of the same documents have a profound impact.
- There is a dire need for police reform to protect rights.
- Literature is used to tell us the narrative and structure of borders and human rights.

Tuesday, May 2	2:00 PM - 2:30 PM	Reflections on Scholarly Engagement and Justice	Dominick Quinney and Jess Roberts
----------------	-------------------	---	-----------------------------------

Key ideas from this session included:

- Finding self expression and liberation through the act of writing is a vital and useful experience; and it is imperative when conducting research.
- Different facets of the human experience are interdependent with each other since we are human beings capable of performing tasks only humans can. Identities are complex and nuanced, as is research, so complex approaches to research are needed. This is often overlooked in academia in favor of objectivity.
- Research should stand on the principles of truth and justice. What is permitted is promoted. Constant self reflection is required when incorporating identity into research in order to humanize it and end the perpetuation of discriminatory and dehumanizing practices.

- Academia must be decolonized through engaging with issues of power, hierarchy, and inequalities rooted in gender, class, race, and ethnicity. All voices and experiences must be valued and respected. Nothing human can be alien to us.
- There are three kinds of stories: the stories we read, the stories the leader shares, and the stories we create together. Only together through stories can we create representative and inclusive communities.
- Stories need to connect with those reading them. We need to see ourselves and our experiences and identities in the books we read (and in research, scholarship, and advocacy).

Advocacy Workshops

The conference prioritized experiential learning by offering two advocacy training workshops.

Monday, May 1	2:00 PM - 4:00 PM	Advocacy Workshop: Enbridge Line 5: The role and practice of activism in securing climate justice	Sean McBrearty, Clean Water Action
---------------	-------------------	---	---------------------------------------

Sean McBrearty of Clean Water Action presented on, “Enbridge Line 5: The role and practice of activism in securing climate justice.” Participants learned how to use issue-based organizing strategies and communications to impact political outcomes. Using the example of Enbridge’s Line 5 pipeline, which runs across the bottomlands of the Great Lakes, McBrearty shared lessons learned about advocating for indigenous rights and climate justice. Participants used these lessons in small groups to strategize effective messaging for other rights and justice campaigns.

Key ideas from this session included:

- The role of organizers is to bring people together, not just to state a problem. It is important to be as inclusive as possible in order to bring people into a movement. Successful movements cut across divisions like class and gender.
- It is important to work with the community as well as communicate with the policy makers. We need to be flexible and ready to adapt when circumstances change while staying committed to the overall objective.

- Successful organizing involves telling effective stories. People are not going to be moved by dry statistics; we need strong narratives that are clear about who are the heroes and who are the villains. (All campaigns also need the components of problem+target+strategy+message.)
- Lesson from Line 5 case: Oil companies fight really hard, and have enormous resources. Even so, a small group of very active citizens can prompt the government to act. Winning hearts and minds (through media and community outreach) is crucial for this. Having a good story matters.

Tuesday, May 2	9:00 AM - 10:30 AM	Albion Human Rights Lab Advocacy Workshop
----------------	--------------------	--

Student members of Albion’s Human Rights Lab also ran an advocacy workshop. This entirely student run workshop encouraged participants to reflect on the human rights issues in their local communities and what participants can do to make a difference. Attendees were given tools necessary to advocate for the social justice issues closest to them and then strategized how to put them into practice. Participants left empowered to enact positive change in their local communities.

Key ideas from this session included:

- Human Rights are rights that all people are born with regardless of any social demographic differences, they are inalienable and deeply interconnected, and they must be regularly monitored and protected.
- Human rights and human rights violations exist at all levels—local, national, and international—and advocacy is important at all levels, but it may be easier to get involved, and possibly more impactful, at the local level—within your own community.
- You can advocate against human rights abuses through communication with decision makers, organizing a protest, or through creative means (such as through art, music, poetry, or performance).
- Due to the interconnectedness of human rights, the abuse of one human right leads to the abuse of other human rights, which is why it is difficult to classify a human right abuse as only political, civil, economic, or social and cultural.
- It is important to have hope that change is possible in order to make change.

Pedagogy Roundtable

We hosted a pedagogy roundtable focused on integrating experiential learning in the human rights classroom with faculty from 5 GLCA and GLAA institutions. Roundtable participants presented on their innovative classroom techniques, including community partnerships, teaching through art, and engagement with digital learning and digital projects.

Tuesday, May 2	9:00 AM - 10:30 AM	Pedagogy Roundtable: Human Rights and Experiential Learning
----------------	--------------------	---

Key ideas from this session included:

- Participants found that the rewards of experiential learning techniques include seeing the growth of students through community and service based learning, seeing students grow as citizens and students in human rights contexts, having the opportunity to take a break from the classroom and see students respond to art with what they have learned throughout the class, and seeing how all participants in community based partnerships learn from one another and from the collaborative process. When done well, all stakeholders benefit.
- Connecting class content to the real world/current cases fosters a deeper meaning and engagement with the class content.
- Serving the community can spark motivation for a student in a legal or advocacy career.
- Experiential learning offers the ability to earn real skills as a by-product of work (for example research or writing skills).
- There needs to be compromises in teaching when using this interactive/engagement method. Doing more experiential learning means prioritizing the process of learning that requires covering less substantive material. The benefits of process and student learning outweigh the downside of having to teach less substantive content.

Student Poster Session

Monday, May 1	4:30 PM - 5:30 PM	Student Poster Session
---------------	-------------------	------------------------

The work of 33 undergraduate and graduate students was presented at the student poster session (see student poster session program in Appendix). Students presented formal scholarship, work in progress, and experiential learning projects using formal posters and presentation slides. Approximately 60 attendees engaged student presenters in conversations on research ranging from identity formation and sportswashing to development induced displacement and environmental migration; and experiential learning projects that included fighting food apartheid in the Albion community and making LGBTQA2S+ resources available on college campuses.

- Individuals who have worked very hard for quite some time had the chance to present their research pertaining to issues regarding human rights. These research topics were original, creative and emphasized issues with human rights such as access to LGBTQIA+ resources as well as the idea of sportswashing.
- Additionally, a decent amount of the research presented about issues in human rights was concerned with the impact that issues with the environment have on the status of human rights, such as development induced displacement and food apartheid.
- All presenters were well versed with their ideas and introduced their topics with zeal.

Community Building Activities

Community building activities were offered at the opening and close of the conference and throughout. Early arrivals were invited to tour the “Global Outcry: Human Rights Around the World” exhibition at the Martha Dickinson Gallery, take an environmental justice tour of Albion, or visit the #OurAlbion photography exhibit. Two letterpress workshops to make protest art were offered by the Albion College art department. The arts as a tool of activism was a conference theme.

Tuesday, May 2	3:00 - 4:00 PM	Mama Sōl - spoken word artist
----------------	----------------	-------------------------------

Spoken word can be a tool of healing and social justice. Key ideas from the musical performance of Mama Sōl Music included:

- Although people focus on traditional forms of advocacy, such as petitioning the government and protests, art forms, such as spoken word and song, can be extremely emotional and impactful ways to reach audiences about human rights issues.
- It is important to apply your passion, purpose, and reason to everything that you do.
- Everyone has a gift and we need to use our gift to leave a positive impact on our communities and society.
- You have the right to say no when you want to. “No is a complete sentence.”
- Be grateful / life can be great.
- Energy is important, be aware of it in yourself and others.

At the close of the conference, film-maker Mike Ramsdell screened his short film *Ukweli* (Truth) and led a discussion on its lessons about artists using their voices to reclaim the narratives of their own history and culture.

Planning Future Collaborations

Tuesday, May 2	4:30 - 5:30PM	Building Future Collaborations Planning Session
----------------	---------------	---

In this closing session, participants were invited to share key take-aways from the conference, offer feedback and identify opportunities for future collaboration. What follows is a summary of some of these ideas.

Takeaways:

- Making change can be difficult, but it is essential to try and hold onto hope; we need to be pushed and feel uncomfortable.
- GLCA and GLAA programming should include more community-engaged learning opportunities, student-oriented conferences, and global course connections. These activities offer unique learning opportunities such as seeing different perspectives from around the world.

What Conference Organizers Can Do to Promote Future Collaboration:

- Share the participant list, presentations and materials, and outcome document.
- Create a network for participants to share their research areas and be able to be in touch with each other; reach out for future collaboration.
- Create a Google Document and Google Spreadsheet with areas of competency and expertise, topics and themes that participants could guest lecture for a class in another school or campus, and core area(s) of expertise that requires minimal preparation.
- Create a website to curate our ideas and share stories and what we are working on.

Ideas for Future Collaboration and Next Steps:

- Some participants have decided to collaborate on their research and write a paper together.
- Replicate the model of the Human Rights Lab on other campuses or coordinate or coordinate student clubs across campuses on shared projects; work in cross-campus ways that are student-led.

- Reach out to alumni and recent graduates to include them in future conferences; small conferences are an ideal space for recent grads and students to have their first conference experience.
- Host a rotating conference that brings alumni and students back together to keep the family together and grow it; rotate campuses to share the organizing burden.
- Some ideas for ways faculty and students can collaborate includes two faculty members inviting students to spend time together (week, semester) to address a topic or piloting a project for a human rights course or an initiative for teaching human rights.
- Set up semester exchanges with faculty who can visit another campus and teach but also provide expertise to help a campus build new things (e.g. Experiential Learning). Generate a professional development alliance to do workshops and meetings, such as a week long set of workshops.
- Partner with other institutions and perhaps join home college funds with GLCA funds.

Feedback Around Student Involvement:

- Engaging youth in human rights issues, scholarship, and practice played a crucial role in the conference.
- Student posters were really excellent. They supplied fresh perspectives on human rights, lots of passion, and hope for the future.
- There is a high appreciation of the level of student involvement throughout the conference; they were a part of the program and effort to generate change. There was lots of hope in the room.
- Students are teachers too.
- The knowledge-sharing and faculty-student collaboration part of the conference was valuable. It was an opportunity for my students to learn and share ideas across campuses.

General Feedback:

- There were lots of lived, unique histories that participants brought together throughout the conference.
- Education doesn't end; learning = lifelong
- The conference caused a renewed interest in human rights teaching and scholarship. One can see the value of using the IHRL regime as a tool for education.
- Small-scale conferences create a huge impact; size = important for collaboration and really learning.
- There were lots of new ideas about how to conceive of and work with human rights, both in our scholarship and teaching (for example creating new human rights labs in other places, around the world).

- Participants appreciated the workshop on how to create an advocacy strategy.

Appendices

Several important documents were shared throughout the conference including information on how to participate in other human rights and justice related activities. We included those documents here as well as a conference directory of human rights experts to facilitate future collaboration among attendees. Many of these documents and conference photos will be available at the conference website:

<https://humanrights.albion.edu/challenging-borders/>.

The following documents are included:

1. Conference Program
2. Student Poster Session Program
3. Conference Directory of Experts
4. Global Liberal Arts Alliance - Course Connections
5. GLCA Global Crossroads - Faculty Opportunities
6. Institute of International Education, Scholar Rescue Fund
7. Equation Campaign Information