

Towards a New Curriculum for Humanitarian Studies? Report on Workshop

Hosted By The Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University.

May 5th and 6th, 2003.

CONTENTS

Summary, Conclusions and Follow-up Actions.

Papers Presented at Workshop:

-Where and What is the Humanitarian Field? *Jennifer Hyndman*.

-What Does It Mean To Be a Professional Humanitarian? *Peter Walker*.

-Preparing Reflective Practitioners. *Susan Purdin*. (abstract)

-A Pedagogy of Post-war Recovery Studies: Reflections From a Master's Program.
Summary notes presented by *Roger MacGinty*.

-Researching Refugees: Some Methodological and Ethical Considerations in Social
Science and Forced Migration. *Karen Jacobsen and Loren Landau*. (since published in
Disasters September 2003, also available on <http://www.unhcr.ch>)

-Nutrition Research in Emergencies. An Investigation of the feasibility of an ENN
research workshop. A pilot study report. *Marie Mcgrath, Jeremy Shoham, Fiona
O'Rielly*. Emergency Nutrition Network.

Participants List.

Participants Biodata.

INTRODUCTION

In April 2002 the Feinstein International Famine Center applied for a renewal of a grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation to support its work in teaching and research on humanitarian issues. One of the proposed outcomes from the grant was to initiate a discussion with other universities that are teaching similar courses to explore areas of convergence, research and teaching methodologies and other aspects relating to the development of what is now a growing field or sub- field called “Humanitarian Studies”. The workshop took place on May 5 and 6 involving participants from Universities in Canada, the United States, Sudan and United Kingdom. Agenda items for the two days were as follows:

Welcome. Objectives and Introductions: *Angela Raven-Roberts, Peter Walker.*

Evolution of Humanitarian studies, Defining the Field.

Moderator: *Jennifer Leaning.*

Discussants: *Laura Hammond, Randolph Kent, Martha Thompson.*

Pedagogical Issues:

Moderator: *Sue Lautze.*

Discussants: *Sarah Lischer, Susan Purdin, Peter Penz, Susan Hurley, Roger MacGinty.*

Research Issues:

Moderator: *Patricia Weiss Fagen.*

Discussants *Karen Jacobsen, Dyan Mazurana, Sean Loughna.*

Future Issues and Follow-up: Towards an Association of Humanitarian Scholars?

Moderator: *Angela Raven-Roberts.*

General Discussion.

.....

The following is a summary of the discussions and points arising from each of the sessions. Full papers and extracts are also included in the appendix. The report will begin though with a summary of the conclusions and follow-up actions agreed on at the workshop.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

-There is much interest and work going on in various academic fields and disciplines pertaining to war, crisis and community response to these issues.

-Whilst there is a growing market and need for practitioner agencies such as NGOs and UN agencies for short practical skills based courses there is also a growing arena of longer term academic based research and teaching fields.

-Those that teach courses in the universities related to humanitarian issues are not necessarily practitioner orientated or have had experience in practitioner organizations. Many of the students do not necessarily go into the practitioner field but do stay in academia and do very extensive and useful research.

-Humanitarian practice and humanitarian studies draws on and enables a healthy interdisciplinary mix of subjects. However because of the single discipline bias in academia there is often difficulty in finding “departmental” homes or niches for those scholars whose interest in the humanitarian field encompasses an interdisciplinary approach.

-An ideal relationship between academia and practice is to use each to inform the other, for the field based practitioners to challenge and inform the theory and for the theory to inform and challenge current practice.

-There are many areas of communality and mutual interest that necessitates conversations, linkages and mutual support between those that teach aspects of humanitarian studies. These revolve around such issues as presentation and methodologies; ethics and techniques around dealing with sensitive and traumatic subjects and events; responding to special needs of students who are themselves from conflict and humanitarian crises affected communities. At the same time there are a range of research issues and methodologies of working in volatile environments and sending students as interns into dangerous environments.

-Universities in crisis-affected communities are ideally the best place sites to pursue research and teaching in these areas but lack the capacity and means to do so. It is contingent on scholars in first world countries who are doing research in crisis affected countries and teaching humanitarian related subjects to be on the forefront to help develop similar courses in these countries and work with national scholars to help expose their work to wider audiences.

-The participants at this workshop agreed that it was fruitful to create opportunities such as this forum to discuss these issues and to maintain linkages in order to exchange ideas, share curricula and deal with challenges and constraints in teaching and research. It was agreed that during the following year participants would explore such mechanisms as the Association of Forced Migration (check this with Karen) as possible models for the creation of an Association of Humanitarian Scholars.

-Participants also agreed that a second meeting to be held in Europe in May 2004 would be useful to meet other institutions and continue the dialogue. A suggestion was made to take up an offer from the University of Uppsala as the possible site of a second meeting.

-Two of the participants agreed to set up a web based discussion page to dialogue around issues of research and around the issue of interns. It was agreed that for example amongst other things the discussions could evolve guidelines and principles for universities and practitioner organizations employing interns.

-The journal Disasters would be approached to see if they had an interest in publishing the completed set of manuscripts from this workshop.

-The Feinstein International Famine Center is in process of compiling some textbooks and would welcome feedback and input from the group.

-Sue Lautze from Tufts offered to organize an “informal meeting on curricula issues” for universities in the New England vicinity. This would be in Fall 2003.

-There has been an offer from a participant to liase with the Universities of Pisa and Turin to keep up interest in this group and possibly attend next year’s meeting.

-The Feinstein International Famine Center is willing to act as a facilitator to keep discussions on these themes going and participants from Clark, York (UK and Canada) the Refugee Studies Center, Oxford and Georgetown University agreed to form a small group to prepare for a future meeting.