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CRRE Update

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CRRE UPDATE

Connecticut College Committee on Refugee Relief and Education

Strengths and Resources at Connecticut College:

The Committee on Refugee Relief and Education was formed in Fall 2016 and immediately began meeting with the goal of coordinating the identified capacities of the College community, these are:

- **Expertise:** Faculty with extensive expertise who teach, research, and publish on a variety of issues relating to refugees and to the Middle East can help educate and raise awareness on the campus and in the local community.
- **Time and commitment:** Connecticut College students are known for their volunteer work. There are ample ways that this commitment to community engagement could be put to use in the service of refugees.
- **Language skills:** Between faculty, staff, and the student body, the College can offer language assistance and translation to people in need of it.
- **Communications:** Through the Office of Communications we have the ability to provide publicity and to draw attention to college-sponsored or linked events.
- **Organizational and logistical support:** The College is well-suited to provide logistical support for convening meetings, conferences, and fundraising events on campus.

History of the Committee:

In the Fall 2015, motivated by the Syrian refugee crisis, President Katherine Bergeron created a task force to investigate ways Connecticut College might use its considerable resources to help alleviate the ongoing refugee crisis. The task force, which include staff, faculty, and students, was chaired by Tristan Borer, Professor of Government and International Relations. After several months of meeting weekly, and through extensive consultation with a variety of entities across campus and local organizations working with refugees, the task force presented its recommendations to President Bergeron. Those recommendations were:

- Facilitate the creation of a student-led organization with a focus of assisting refugees through lobbying efforts, fundraising, tutoring, acculturation assistance, and organizing awareness-raising events.
- Become a college affiliate of PaperAirplanes, an online tutoring site connecting US college students, faculty and staff with Syrian college-aged students in order to provide English tutoring via Skype.
- Admit Syrian Students to Connecticut College through establishing a relationship with Jusoor's 100 Syrian Women, 10,000 Syrian Lives initiative.
- Continue to host visiting refugee scholars through the College's relationship with the Institute for International Relations (IIE) Scholar Rescue Fund and expand this effort by establishing a relationship with the Scholars at Risk Network.
- Donate Give-and-Go items to local refugee resettlement organizations.
- Create a unified internship with a refugee-specific focus.
- Integrate student co-curricular and curricular interests combining the strands of teaching, volunteering, and interning.
- Publicize the College's leadership in the area of refugee relief and education through the Office of Communication thereby encouraging other institutions to embrace this kind of concern for refugees.
- Work with our partners in the New London community to meet the needs of local organizations and refugee families.
- Help refugees in their region of origin by supporting local NGOs in the region.
- Establish a permanent committee of students, staff and faculty to continue the work of the task force and help coordinate the implementation of these recommendations.

CRRE Activities in Spring 2017:

Since it was formed in December 2016, CRRE has focused energy in support of local refugee resettlement efforts and fundraising events. To that end the committee has sponsored events, provided logistical support, represented the College at local events, and promoted refugee related information on the [CRRE Facebook Page](#).

Events:

In February, CRRE hosted a screening of the documentary *Salam Neighbor* about the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. The film was purchased by the College for the event and a panel of faculty, students and a representative from Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS) led a discussion after the film. The event was well attended by the local community and nearly \$1,800 was raised by Start Fresh for their work with refugee families in New London.

In March the office of Community Partnerships hosted a fundraising banquet in collaboration with Start Fresh. The event was held on campus and was attended by students, faculty, staff and members of the local community. This was an opportunity to dine with refugee families and to learn about refugee issues while raising funds for resettlement efforts. CRRE promoted the event and requested that President Bergeron sponsor a block of tickets for a selected group of Conn students who consistently demonstrate a commitment to refugee issues.

Also in March, members of CRRE were part of a panel discussion at the *Queens of Syria* documentary film screening, sponsored by Professor Virginia Anderson. The documentary is about a group of Syrian refugees who tell their stories through an adaptation of Euripides's *The Trojan Women*.

Community Support:

CRRE invites community members whose work directly impacts resettled refugees to attend our meetings. Our guests have included the Executive Director of the Public Library of New London, members of the New London resettlement agency Start Fresh, and representatives from the College's Human Resource Office. Through these meetings we identified areas of greatest need as access to Arabic language resources; ESOL tutoring support, transportation, and employment. Though the committee was unable to make progress on transportation and employment needs, support is in process for other areas:

Arabic resources for the New London Public Library: The committee has actively pursued donations from students traveling from Arabic speaking countries. Waed Athamneh successfully solicited donations of books in Arabic from several organizations. The books will be shipped to the College and student volunteers and staff will help the public library catalogue these resources.

ESOL tutoring services for local refugee families: Working with the Dean of Global Initiatives and with funding from the Mellon foundation, the Academic Resource Center is currently developing an ESOL tutor training program for CC students. Not only will these students be an asset for our own community, they will also have the opportunity to serve the needs of the New London community –including newly resettled refugee families.

CRRE recognizes that if the college is to make a meaningful impact on the refugee issue, the momentum must come from a desire and commitment from the College community as a whole – students, faculty and staff working together. In the future committee efforts will focus on educational events and in supporting student efforts on behalf of the refugee community.



Looking Ahead to 2017-2018

CRRE looks forward to continuing the work we have begun and will focus on using the College community's strengths in implementing plans for the coming year.

Plans include:

- Pursue the College's engagement with Scholars at Risk.
- Bring a panel of Alums to campus to talk about their contribution in the field of refugee work.
- Join PaperAirplanes to connect Connecticut college students to the important work this organization does.
- Encourage student engagement on campus by inviting more student participation on the committee and by working with REF to create educational events around related refugee issues.
- Continue support of local organizations by collaborating with Community Partnerships and by offering logistical assistance for fundraising efforts.
- Promote community refugee related events and organizations on the CRRE Facebook page.
- Support campus student groups working on refugee issues with logistical support, promotion, and faculty expertise.
- Support any Connections-related curricular developments related to refugee issues.