

PRESIDENTS' ALLIANCE | ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND IMMIGRATION

Higher Ed Afghan Response and Advocacy: Action & Information Briefing

Speaker Bios

September 9, 2021

Diya Abdo, Founder and Director, Every Campus A Refuge (ECAR) & Director, UNCG Center for New North Carolinians



Dr. Diya Abdo is a professor of English and Founder and Director of Every Campus A Refuge, a higher education initiative that partners colleges and universities with refugee resettlement agencies to temporarily host refugees on campus grounds and support them in their resettlement.

Jonathan Becker, Executive Vice President and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Bard College & Vice Chancellor of Open Society University Network



Jonathan Becker is the director of the Center for Civic Engagement and Executive Vice President and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Bard. As director of CCE, Jonathan has general oversight of the center's activities and coordinates programming among the center affiliates and the Bard's national and international networks. He is also an associate professor of political studies specializing in Russian and eastern European politics, media and politics, and education reform.

Dr. Becker earned his B.A. from McGill University in 1987 and his DPhil. from St. Antony's College, Oxford in 1993. He is the author of *Soviet and Russian Press Coverage of the United States: Press, Politics and Identity in Transition* (1999; revised and expanded edition, 2002), guest editor of a special issue of *Education Studies/Voprosy obrazovania on Liberal Arts and Science Education* (2015), co-editor of *Svobodniye Iskusstva i Nauki na Sovremennom Etape: Opyt SShA i Evropy v Kontekste Rossiiskogo Obrazovaniya* (2014), and author of chapters and articles in a variety of books and publications, including *Voprosy Obrazovaniya*, *European Journal of Communication*, *Journalism and Mass Communications Quarterly*, and *Demokratiizatsiya*. Prior to coming to Bard in 1997, he served as assistant vice president of the Central European University in Budapest and as the European director of the Civic Education Project.

Esther Benjamin, CEO and Executive Director, World Education Services (WES)



Esther Benjamin has been a global executive in the public, private, and civil society sectors for more than 25 years. She has led business partnerships, as well as education, engagement, health, and economic development programs in over 100 countries. She is currently CEO and Executive Director of World Education Services. Previously, she was CEO for Africa Operations with Laureate Education, and she served in the administrations of President Obama and President Clinton. Esther holds master's degrees in International Affairs and Applied Economics from American University, as well as a bachelor's degree in Political Science and English from North Central College. New York Times

best-selling author Wes Moore profiled Esther as "The Globalist" in his book *The Work: Searching for a Life that Matters*.

Dan Berger, Partner at Curran, Berger and Kludt; member, AILA Afghanistan Task Force



Dan Berger is a partner at the immigration law firm of Curran, Berger & Kludt in Northampton, MA. He is a founding member of the US Alliance of International Entrepreneurs, an Honorary Fellow of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys, on the Legal Advisory Board of the Presidents' Alliance on Immigration & Higher Education, and a member of the USCIS Liaison Committee and the newly formed Afghanistan Task Force for the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA).

He is a frequent writer and speaker on immigration, most recently for the Brookings Institute on recommendations for the Biden/Harris Administration and ways to support international entrepreneurs. He is editing updates for release in 2021 of Immigration Options for Academics and Researchers and International Adoption & Other Immigration Options for Children.

Jennifer Dewar, Director of Strategic Engagement for the Duolingo English Test



Jennifer Dewar is the Director of Strategic Engagement for the Duolingo English Test and has worked in college admissions since 2001. Prior to joining Duolingo, Jennifer was Senior Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions at Washington University in St. Louis. She has also worked in the admissions offices at Duke University and Connecticut College. Jennifer has recruited extensively in Asia, Europe and India and has chaired the Admissions Practices Committee on the

International ACAC Executive Board. She has a Bachelor's degree from Dickinson College and Master's degree from Duke University.

[Emal Dusst, Director at Sterling Partners; Vice Chair of Board, American University of Afghanistan](#)



Emal works in private equity with a focus on the education sector. He is also on the founding team of Cintana Education, formed in partnership with Arizona State University to create a new global network of universities which each seek to grow in scale and excellence. Emal serves or has served as a board member or observer on several education companies/institutions, including Coursera, the American University of Afghanistan (Vice Chair of Board), the World Affairs Council in DC and ReCoded, a United Nations-funded non-profit coding school for refugees. Additionally, he is a member of the Education Leadership Council at the Brookings Institution, where he writes on global education trends, and a Board Advisor at The Aspen Institute's workforce analytics initiative. Emal is also a Term Member at the Council on Foreign Relations. Emal holds a Bachelor's Degree in Economics with a minor in German from UCLA and an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University

[Khadeja Farahmand- Chief of Staff, Baltimore City Office of Equity and Civil Rights](#)



Khadeja Farahmand is originally from Afghanistan. She is the first from her village in Kunduz Province to attend school and obtain a law degree. She currently serves as the Chief of Staff for the Baltimore Office of Equity and Civil Rights and is earning a juris doctorate from the University of Baltimore School of Law. She was a human and women rights' activist and a law professor in Afghanistan.

In addition, her work history in Afghanistan includes service with USAID and work as a foreign relations officer and a gender specialist. Prior to her work in Baltimore with the Office of Equity and Civil Rights, Khadeja worked with the City Law Department. Khadeja has two law degrees, one from India and another from the University of Dayton Law School.

She currently lives with her American host family in Roland park of Baltimore.

[Miriam Feldblum, Ph.D., Executive Director, Presidents' Alliance](#)



Miriam Feldblum is a co-founder and executive director of the Presidents' Alliance. She previously served as vice president for student affairs/dean of students and professor of politics at Pomona College from 2007-2018, as special assistant to the president, senior director for academic support and planning and research associate at Caltech (1995-2007), and as an assistant professor of Politics at the University of San Francisco (1991-1995), and is a non-resident fellow at the Migration Policy Institute. Miriam received a B.A. in Political Science from Barnard College, and a M.A., M.Phil, and Ph.D in Political Science from Yale University.

[Allan Goodman, President and Chief Executive Officer, Institute of International Education](#)



Dr. Allan E. Goodman is the sixth President of the Institute of International Education, which marked its Centennial in 2019. IIE promotes the exchange of scholars and students, rescues scholars, students, and artists from persecution, displacement, and crises, conducts research on international academic mobility, and administers the Fulbright program sponsored by the United States Department of State, as well as over 200 other corporate, government and privately-sponsored programs. U.S. Senate Resolution 146 passed unanimously in April 2019 commending IIE for its work in all these areas.

Dr. Goodman is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a founding member of the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), and serves on the selection committees for the Rhodes and Schwarzman Scholars and the WISE and Yidan Prizes. He also serves on the Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group Advisory Council and the Board of Trustees of the Education Above All Foundation. Dr. Goodman has a Ph.D. in Government from Harvard, an M.P.A. from the John F. Kennedy School of Government and a B.S. from Northwestern University, and is the recipient of honorary degrees from Canadian, European, Japanese, UK, and US universities. He received decorations for his work in promoting educational exchange and scholar rescue from the governments of France, Germany, and Norway; he received the first Gilbert Medal from the Universitas 21 Organisation.

Before joining IIE, Dr Goodman was Executive Dean of the School of Foreign Service and Professor at Georgetown University. His books on international relations are published by Princeton, Harvard, and Yale University presses. He has served at the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Rebecca Granato, Associate Vice President for Global Initiatives, Bard College and Director of the OSUN Hubs for Connected Learning Initiatives



Rebecca Granato is the Associate Vice President for Global Initiatives at Bard College and Program Director for the Open Society University Network's Hubs for Connected Learning Initiatives (Hubs) in Eastern Africa and the MENA region. Dr. Granato's work focuses on developing and delivering contextualized, learner-centred learning experiences in undergraduate courses, teacher professional development and research-oriented training in places affected by crisis and displacement for refugees, internally displaced people and those in the host communities. She has also been an Associate of Bard College's Institute for Writing & Thinking since 2004, in which capacity she has developed and delivered teacher professional development in places as far reaching as Myanmar, Jordan and Kyrgyzstan, among others. Following undergraduate and graduate studies at Bard College, Exeter College, Oxford, and CUNY, she received her PhD in Global History from the intercampus program based at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Canada.

Arien Mack, Director, New University in Exile Consortium



Arien Mack is the Alfred and Monette Marrow Professor of [Psychology](#) Emeritus at The New School for Social Research, where she has edited *Social Research* since 1970. She established the Social Research conference series in 1988, which she continues to direct. Arien was also the founder and director of the [Journal Donation Project](#) (JDP), which ran from 1990 until 2018. JDP provided low-cost academic and research journals to libraries and universities in countries where access to those publications had been difficult for political and/or economic reasons. In 2007, she launched [Endangered Scholars Worldwide](#), dedicated to drawing attention to the plight of scholars, students, and researchers around the world whose lives and livelihoods are under threat due to the nature of their work or political positions. In 2018 she launched and now directs the [New University in Exile Consortium](#) which currently has 34 universities and colleges as members and is host to 58 endangered, exiled scholars from 18 countries. As a research psychologist, her current interests focus on perception, cognition, and attention. Her publications include more than 60 articles as well as books and the co-authored volume *Inattentional Blindness* (MIT Press 1998).

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President & CEO, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services



Krish O'Mara Vignarajah is the President and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS). She previously

served in the Obama White House as Policy Director for First Lady Michelle Obama and at the State Department as Senior Advisor under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of State John Kerry. At the White House, Krish led the First Lady's signature Let Girls Learn initiative. At the State Department, she coordinated development and implementation of multiple programs including those concerning refugees and migration, engagement with religious communities, the legal dimensions of U.S. foreign policy, and regional issues relating to Africa and the Middle East.

Before joining the White House, Krish practiced law at Jenner & Block in Washington, DC, clerked for Chief Judge Michael Boudin on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, and taught at Georgetown University as an adjunct. She holds a B.S. in Molecular Biology and an M.A. in Political Science from Yale College, a J.D. from Yale Law School, and an M.Phil in International Relations from Oxford University (Marshall Scholarship). Krish has been recognized as one of *The Daily Record's* Top 50 Influential Marylanders and Top 100 Women.

[Sarah Willcox, Deputy Director, Scholars at Risk Network](#)



Sarah Willcox is Deputy Director of Scholars at Risk with responsibility for SAR's internal operations, administration, and programming, including SAR's protection, advocacy, and membership teams. Before SAR, Sarah had over 15 years of progressive responsibility at IIE's Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF), ultimately as senior director, and before that three years with the Fulbright program. She has advised in the establishment of a number of scholar protection programs in the US and Europe and served on the steering committees of various advocacy organizations including the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) and the University Alliance for At-Risk Migrants and Refugees (UARRM). Sarah is an alumna of Vassar College and a member of the Board of Directors of the Summit School at Nyack.

[Jill Welch, Senior Policy Advisor for Presidents' Alliance](#)



Jill Welch is Senior Policy Advisor on international student and refugee learner issues at the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration. She has served in senior policy leadership positions both inside and outside of government, including the Hill, the Institute of International Education, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, and the U.S. Institute of Peace. She holds an MPA from American University and a BA in political science and French from Berry College.

