REPORT FROM THE RESEARCH STRATEGY WORKSHOP

16TH AUGUST 2016

The Workshop was convened by Claudia Tazreiter, Linda Bartolomei, Caroline Lenette and Susan Schmeidl with research assistance provided by Nayana Bibile.
A very successful Research Strategy Workshop was held on 16 August 2016 to formally launch the Faculty’s Forced Migration Research Network. The main aims of the workshop were: to foster connections between researchers working across diverse disciplinary areas across the Faculty; to map current research activities and interests; and to develop a plan for future activities and collaborations. The response to the workshop invitation exceeded expectations with 34 scholars from all Schools and Centres across the Faculty registering their interest. The workshop participants included senior academics, postdoctoral scholars and PhD students. Professor Jane McAdam who is leading the Grand Challenge on Refugees and Migrants and several of her colleagues from the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law also attended.

**Background and Rationale for the Network**

Today, one in seven people are on the move. For some, this is a choice but for others the displacement is forced due to conflict, discrimination, persecution, extreme poverty, or environmental disasters. Mobility is a pathway for many in search of safety or better opportunities but it also involves many risks. Given the multifaceted nature of human mobility and displacement, a multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach to research that engages with this phenomenon is required.

In recognition of this increasingly complex area, and the breadth of interdisciplinary work being undertaken at UNSW Arts & Social Sciences, the Forced Migration Research Network (FMRN) was initiated by scholars affiliated with the Centre for Refugee Research (CRR) based in the School of Social Sciences. This network builds on a long history of high impact work undertaken by the CRR, but importantly also draws together other researchers from history, philosophy, media and film studies, cultural studies, education and social psychology who are producing highly original research on various aspects of human mobility. The network aims to foster deeper collaboration across the disciplines and Schools in FASS to showcase the diversity of innovative work being undertaken, to leverage such collaboration in future research and funding opportunities and to identify ways in which the network and the university can support refugees and forced migrants who are also co-collaborators in much research being undertaken. Funding to support the development of the network and for the Research workshop was provided through a small research grant provided by the School of Social Sciences and supplemented by consolidated funds from the Centre for Refugee Research.

**The Workshop**

The workshop was opened the Associate Dean Research, Dr David Bright on behalf of the Dean, Professor Susan Dodd’s. Following the opening, five scholars working across diverse disciplinary perspectives shared brief summaries of their current research in the field of forced migration, displacement and mobility. The presentations highlighted the strength of drawing together critical interdisciplinary perspectives and scholarship in stimulating the discussion and collegiality evident in the following hours of discussion. The brief
presentations that began the workshop highlighted the complexity of motivations for movement, the heterogeneity of mobile populations and bordering practices, the politics of protection, State and civil society responses. The presentations also highlighted some key issues of ethical practice related to academic work in this area.

Some participants’ primary research focus is on (re) settlement issues in Australia with a focus on influencing policymaking and advocacy. Other participants pursue a global outlook on the issues of mobility for diverse groups including refugee and asylum seekers, labour migrants and internal displacement as a result of conflict, development or climate-change. A number of participants work on artistic and creative depictions of human mobility, on historical perspectives as well as the role of memory making.

**Importantly,** the workshop highlighted the diversity of methodological approaches to the study forced migration, including oral histories, creative media and large-scale quantitative modelling. A strong and shared focus was on participatory and rights-based approaches that centres on the agency of mobile and vulnerable populations. It was clear that all participants share a common goal in both contributing to fundamental knowledge about forced migration and human mobility while also improving the perceptions and treatment of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Australia, the region and globally. In this way the workshop highlighted a broader key discussion on the role of academics in creating original, high impact research that also has an impact on social change.

There was significant interest in collaborating on future seminar series, developing workshops and public events to explore themes including: ethical research methodologies, academics as advocates, media and representation. There was also significant interest in establishing a researcher-mentoring scheme within the network for grant writing and quality and high impact publications.

**Outcomes and Next Steps**

The Research Strategy Workshop has made an important contribution to the Faculty by profiling the study of refugees, forced migration, bordering practices and human mobility as a core research strength in Arts & Social Sciences, and highlighted the key role that the FMRN will play in relation to UNSW’s Grand Challenge on Refugee and Migrants.

Key outcomes from the workshop include continued engagement across FASS and plans for a major Refugee Conference to be held at UNSW from the 22nd and 23rd February 2017 as part of the Grand Challenge on Refugees and Migrants. Dr Linda Bartolomei is the UNSW focal point for the conference, which is being conducted in partnership with the Refugee Council of Australia. In addition to the main conference, FMRN will host an academic symposium on Tuesday 21st February that will be designed to explore some of the key themes discussed during the workshop. Two special editions of Journals are planned from the symposium and conference. The areas of research focus for the special editions are currently being finalised.