

The Far-Right in History, Politics and the College Classroom
AALAC Workshop
Proposal for Amherst College, Spring 2024

Workshop Organizers

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Anita Kurimay (Bryn Mawr College, History)
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Confirmed Attendees

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We will put out a call to faculty in the social sciences and history at AALAC schools that focus their work on the development, emergence, trajectory, and composition of the Far-Right and/or related movements. The goal is to have eighteen participants from AALAC schools, plus one keynote speaker, for a total of nineteen colleagues. Ten to fifteen of the participants will discuss a pre-circulated paper, while the rest will either be a panelist or participant in the conversations throughout the workshop without a formal presentation.

Workshop Description

The resurgence and mainstreaming of the Far-Right at home and abroad in the last decade has taken much of the world by surprise, and call for a reconsideration not only of its future but also of its history. In the current crisis of liberal democracy, academia has a vital role to play. As researchers, we should use our methods of inquiry to shed critical insights on a dangerous yet largely enigmatic phenomenon. As educators, we have the duty to provide our students with some tools to engage critically with these new ideological and political threats.

The structural challenges of studying the Far-Right are well known—beginning with positionality and terminology—and yet, this decade has already seen several pathbreaking studies of the Far-Right, and the creation of both research centers and academic journals of note. Nonetheless, it seems that academic inquiry into the Far-Right so far has largely shied away from offering bold assessments of the movement as a complex and multidimensional whole. For

instance, even as pertinent historical studies of the Far-Right have, for very good reason, focused on the Eurocentric genealogy of fascism, from proto-fascism to neo-fascism, the Far-Right in the twenty-first century has emerged as a much broader phenomenon, in chronology, in geography, and in attributes. But how do these histories speak to important work being done on other movements in other times and places, including, for instance, Ku Klux Klan, anti-Communist authoritarianism, and Hindu Nationalism (among many others)? Work in political science and sociology has tended to operate within rather than across disciplinary boundaries, focusing on specific cases or ideologies in the present moment. Yet, while this scholarship, on public opinion, party mobilization, and social movements provides a vital comparative perspective to our understanding of how and why Far-Right wing movements emerge, with crucial exceptions, it rarely engages the question of development over time. For a conceptual breakthrough in the study of the many faces of the Far-Right, its historians and social scientists need ever greater transdisciplinary dialogue.

Format

We propose a workshop that will take place at Amherst in the spring of 2024 and would like to bring together scholars within political science, history, and related fields from across AALAC institutions to facilitate three types of encounters: one grounded in our current monographic projects, another in our disciplinary engagement with the Far-Right more broadly, and a third focused on pedagogy and engagement of the Far-Right in a liberal arts setting. Liberal arts colleges are in a unique position to bring about this kind of interdisciplinary dialogue. On one hand, our emphasis on classroom discussion as a democratic institution, replete with diverse viewpoints, provides a pedagogical anchor to simultaneously consider and critique troubling political currents like the Far-Right. On the other hand, the already lower barrier across disciplines and departments in liberal arts colleges offers a natural setting for such cross-disciplinary inquiry.

Goals, Assessment, and Follow-Up Activity

Advance scholarship and teaching that focuses on the Far-Right by gathering scholars from the social sciences and history to facilitate an exploration of the Far-Right through an interdisciplinary lens—encouraging conversation and inquiry among scholar-teachers and the formation of ongoing relationships that include opportunities for collaborative mentorship.

Discuss pedagogical strategies and approaches to teaching—e.g., panels on curriculum, collaborative research, etc.

Further scholarship through the presentation of work; Keynote lecture by experts.

Post-Workshop:

The workshop participants will be invited to reconvene a year later—probably over Zoom—in order to identify pedagogical and academic priorities. For that purpose, participants will receive evaluation forms by the end of the workshop, which will later be analyzed by the organizers. In addition a shared Google drive folder will be created for the workshop community, where syllabi (but potentially also scholarship) will be shared.

Proposed Schedule

DAY ONE 7:00 p.m. Opening dinner

DAY TWO

8:30 a.m.– 9:00 a.m. Continental breakfast + welcome
9:00 a.m.–10:00 a.m. Panel Discussion (Disciplinary Frontiers POSC)
10:00 a.m.–10:15 a.m. Coffee break
10:15 a.m.–11:15 a.m. Workshop Panel One (two–three papers)¹
11:15 a.m.–11:30 a.m. Coffee break
11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. Workshop Panel Two (two–three papers)
12:30 p.m.–1:30 p.m. Lunch
1:30 p.m.–2:30 p.m. Panel Discussion (Disciplinary Frontiers HIST)
2:30 p.m.–2:45 p.m. Coffee break
2:45 p.m.–3:45 p.m. Workshop Panel Three (two–three papers)
3:45 p.m.– 4:00 p.m. Coffee break
4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m. Workshop Panel Four (two–three papers)
5:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m. Informal Syllabi sessions (in collaboration with the Center for Teaching and Learning)
7:00 p.m. Dinner + keynote speaker

DAY THREE

8:30 a.m.–9:30 a.m. Breakfast and informal, moderated teaching discussion - lesson plans
9:30 a.m.–10:30 a.m. Workshop Panel Five (two–three papers)
10:30 a.m.–10:45 a.m. Coffee break
10:45 a.m.–11:45 a.m. Panel Discussion: The Far-Right and the Liberal Arts College
11:45 a.m.– Lunch and departures

¹ We assume ten to fifteen pre-circulated papers. Hence each of the four panels may consist of either two or three presentations.