

**ALLIANCE TO ADVANCE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES
FACULTY WORKSHOP PROPOSAL, SPRING 2023**

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The Future of Research and Teaching on Contemporary China at Liberal Arts Colleges

Relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) were deteriorating even before the COVID pandemic, but since 2020 they have turned down sharply. Venues for collaboration have shuttered; US-based scholars and students cannot visit China. While pandemic-related restrictions will not last forever, we anticipate that negative political trends will continue after China reopens its doors, and that interactions will not return to pre-COVID norms. Given those trends, we expect the research climate for faculty and students alike to be less hospitable and more challenging.

We propose a two-day workshop (Spring 2023) that will examine challenges in the current research environment in China and develop strategies to (1) maintain faculty research productivity despite these challenges, (2) facilitate undergraduate student research, and (3) teach effectively and with integrity while maintaining student interest. The workshop will bring together LAC faculty at all career stages to promote cross-generational learning and cooperation.

The workshop will lay the groundwork for an ongoing process of collaboration and support, sharing ideas and resources for retooling our professional development plans and guiding student research. We will use remote meetings and institutional resources for these post-workshop activities.

Workshop Agenda:

Day 1: Researching China in an era of low/no access

The pandemic has revealed how professionally damaging it can be to lose access to field sites in China. The summer of 2022 will be the third summer without field research, and access in the future remains uncertain. For China specialists, however, growing limitations on field access pre-dated the pandemic and they are unlikely to disappear when the pandemic ends.

Indicative of the severity of these challenges, the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University convened a webinar in November 2021 to provide guidance to graduate students struggling to complete their research projects. No similar event has focused on the specific needs of LAC faculty and students, however. Field research not only supports LAC faculty professional development, it also aligns with our teaching. Many of us have used summer teaching to access our field sites, and programs like the AsiaNetwork Freeman Student-Faculty Fellows Program support research with undergraduates. The challenge is how to sustain the faculty-student research agenda during this time of uncertainty.

The first day of the workshop will therefore be devoted to exploring in detail the constraints researchers face and the best methods for circumventing those constraints. More specifically, on day one the workshop participants will: 1) undertake a survey of the current research environment in China; 2) assess the particular challenges facing LAC faculty; 3) determine what new skill sets will best serve LAC faculty goals; 4) identify new data sources; and 5) discuss how participants can leverage their combined experience and resources to develop collaborations tailored to LAC faculty needs.

We plan to invite scholars with expertise in a range of research methods to discuss resources for quantitative and mixed-methods research about China. This group will include those who are experienced in conducting research without access to field work in the PRC, either before or after 1978.

Day 2: Teaching through Tensions

As tensions rise and China's image in the United States sours, we find our students uncertain about whether and how to engage China. Chinese language enrollments, once buoyed by students who envisioned studying and working in China, are sagging. Students' views of China increasingly reflect the negativity in society, which makes it more difficult – and more important – to convey accurate, balanced information. Meanwhile, our Chinese international students are squeezed between a more nationalistic homeland and more critical America.

Our second day together will be spent sharing models for teaching about China in the current climate, including:

- Teaching China as a case in thematic courses, such as **Tyrene White's** course on disaster politics
- Team teaching to leverage area expertise in our departments
- Designing interdisciplinary China courses such as **Kate Kaup's** Environmental Issues in China
- Imagining alternatives to traditional study abroad while China is “closed”
- Organizing virtual exchanges with students in China and at other LACs

Post-Workshop:

Post-workshop activities will include follow-up remote sessions designed to foster further collaboration among China specialists at AALAC institutions. Although the precise focus of those sessions will be determined by workshop participants, we expect they will focus on: 1) development of skill sets in quantitative and mixed methods approaches to research; 2) prospects for research collaboration among AALAC faculty and their students; 3) pedagogical approaches to teaching about China; and 4) cross-college student engagement and collaboration. Our goal is to construct an ongoing collaborative network to support LAC faculty and students.

Assessment:

We hope to arrange a meeting one year after the workshop, in conjunction with the annual Asian Studies Association conference. Participants will discuss their individual and collaborative experiences and identify areas in need of further development.

Workshop Participants:

We expect to recruit 12-14 participants for this workshop, plus four guest speakers (two remote, and two in person). Self-funded AALAC faculty will also be welcome to participate.

In addition to the four liberal arts colleges represented by the workshop organizing committee, faculty from five additional LAC's have indicated a desire to participate, and we expect that number to rise.