

## Welcoming Campus Initiative

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### **Executive summary**

The Welcoming Campus Initiative is a holistic approach to sponsoring domestic and international refugee students on the George Washington University (GWU) campus through a scholarship and mentorship program. This initiative would begin by supporting students who have already been resettled to the U.S., and grow within the next five years to bring refugee students from abroad. This international aspect is uniquely aligned with the goals of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' new project: Complementary Pathways to refugee resettlement. In bringing refugees to the U.S. on student visas, higher education institutions like GWU can support displaced individuals in accessing asylum from within the country, providing a sustainable and legal alternative to refugee resettlement. UNHCR is looking for programs like these to contribute to their 15by30 goal of entering 15 percent of refugees into higher education by 2030 – up from the current 3 percent of refugees globally with access to higher education. This initiative would be the first of its kind in the U.S., drawing some inspiration from [Columbia University's Scholarship for Displaced Students](#), and would place GWU at the forefront of this growing national and government-supported movement to increase refugee access to higher education.

The scholarship will cover tuition, housing, meals, health insurance, and more with a full breakdown of costs on pages 5-6 of this report. The scholarship could be funded if each department at GWU committed to waiving tuition for one student's four years of studies, with the sponsoring department alternating on a rotating basis. A student fee would cover non-tuition costs, outlined on page 6. An independent application review board will facilitate the selection process for applicants to this program, employing inclusive admissions practices specific to students whose education has been disrupted by displacement (pages 6-7). Welcoming Campus students will also receive thorough guidance prior to and after arrival on campus through a dedicated Welcoming Campus Student Support Team (pages 12-13), the student organization, No Lost Generation GWU, various established on-campus resources, and non-profit organizations in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area. This initiative will serve as a pilot for similar initiatives at campuses across the country with the goal of creating a Welcoming Campus cohort under the greater organization of the University Alliance for Refugees and at-Risk Migrants' Student Voices for Refugees (UARRM SVR). GWU is in a unique position to lead this national effort and take direct action to engage in durable solutions for refugees globally.

**To commit to supporting this proposal, [please fill out this form](#) and contact Olivia Issa at [oissa@gwmail.gwu.edu](mailto:oissa@gwmail.gwu.edu) with any questions or comments.**

## **Introduction**

### *Resettlement & complementary pathways*

Refugee resettlement is a crucial international service that provides durable solutions to individuals fleeing violence and persecution to rebuild their lives. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) coordinates all refugee resettlement globally, with the United States being a leading resettling country in the world. However, of the 80 million forcibly displaced individuals globally,<sup>1</sup> only 1 percent of the world's refugees are resettled each year, according to the UNHCR. Additionally, only 3 percent of refugees have access to higher education. In 2018, the UN convened with nations' leaders in a UN Global Compact on Refugees,<sup>2</sup> and agreed to commit to pursuing "Complementary Pathways" to resettlement. Complementary Pathways, "are legal options for displaced individuals to achieve asylum outside of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) resettlement process."<sup>3</sup> These Pathways involve bringing displaced individuals into countries of resettlement on visas, such as humanitarian admissions, community sponsorship, family reunification, labor, and student visas. Once individuals enter the country of resettlement, they can apply for asylum from within the country. This is a completely legal and sound process supported by the UN, and can take weight off the overwhelmed resettlement system. In short, higher education institutions (HEIs) can contribute to the U.S. Complementary Pathways commitment by making applications and funding to study more accessible to international refugee students. The more higher education institutions (HEIs) can open their doors to international refugee students, the more students can access refugee status through student visas – not to mention the life changing experience of attending college.

### *Barriers to higher education access*

Refugee students currently face high barriers to accessing HEIs, including finances, application accessibility, language barriers, social support, and prior institution transcript access, among other factors. By nature, displaced populations often lose their wealth in migration, are forced to work in jobs that pay inhumane wages, and are systemically forced into poverty. Thus, this scholarship would need to take these factors into account during the admissions and scholarship building process. See more about specific access barriers in "Application Process" on pages 7-8.

### *Existing programs:*

<sup>1</sup> Refugee Data Finder, UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

<sup>2</sup> "The Global Compact on Refugees." UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>

<sup>3</sup> Complementary pathways for admission to third countries, UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/complementary-pathways.html#:~:text=Complementary%20pathways%20are%20safe%20and,a%20sustainable%20and%20lasting%20solution.>

Several programs exist across North America that provide full scholarships to international refugee students and mentor them through the asylum process. First, the Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students<sup>4</sup> program provides full scholarships to up to 30 refugee students each year including all living expenses. The university funds this program by its commitment of over \$6 million dollars to supporting these students each year. The university hired trained staff on campus to provide counseling and guidance to recipient students on an individual- and cohort-basis.

World University Services Canada (WUSC)<sup>5</sup> is the oldest existing program in North America to sponsor international refugee students, dating back to the 1920s and sponsoring over 2,000 students throughout its history. WUSC is a team of student leaders and nonprofit staff at university campuses across Canada who sponsor international refugee students and mentor them throughout their education and into careers. WUSC's financial model is uniquely sustainable: each campus holds a yearly student referendum in which each student commits to paying \$1-20 on top of their tuition bill to cover a refugee student's tuition and living expenses in full. Once recipient students arrive on campus, trained students on each campus provide tutoring and social mentorship to ensure a smooth adjustment to campus.

Lastly, Proyecto Habesha<sup>6</sup> sponsors international refugee students mainly from Syria to Mexican campuses, prepares them for academic and social life, and ensures they study for free for 4+ years at a university. The organization finances scholarships across at least five campuses each year by negotiating with university administrators to cover tuition in full for 1-3 students per year. From there, Proyecto Habesha collects independent donations and sponsorships to cover housing and living expenses for their students. In addition to four years at a university, students participate in a year-long program prior to university entrance with intensive Spanish language and college-preparatory education.

### **Scholarship overview**

The Welcoming Campus scholarship is dedicated to students who have formal refugee status under UNHCR<sup>7</sup> or who are seeking asylum to study at the George Washington University in a four-year undergraduate program. While in school at GWU, international refugee students will be able to apply for asylum, providing an equivalent to the refugee resettlement process that is compatible with the United Nations' Complementary Pathways<sup>8</sup> objectives. To support refugee students, the scholarship must cover full tuition, housing, meals, books, insurance, visa fees as necessary, application fees, and any other costs associated with resettling to the U.S. and

<sup>4</sup> Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students, <https://globalcenters.columbia.edu/CUSDS><sup>5</sup> World University Services Canada <https://wusc.ca/about/>

<sup>6</sup> Proyecto Habesha <https://www.proyectohabesha.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Refugee Status Determination, UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/refugee-status-determination.html>

<sup>8</sup> Complementary pathways for admission to third countries, UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/complementary-pathways.html#:~:text=Complementary%20pathways%20are%20safe>

attending the university. This scholarship will be funded in part by alumni and independent donations, part by student contributions, and lastly, by university matching funds.

## Funding details

### Overview

As outlined above, it is vital that all costs of living and studying in the U.S. are covered for international refugee students. Below is a summary of all costs associated with four years of study at GWU, as well as a breakdown of where funds would come from.

### Cost breakdown

Item	Cost for 1 year	Cost for 4 years
<a href="#">Tuition</a>	\$59,780	\$239,120
<a href="#">Median housing and dining costs</a>	\$16,000 median	\$64,000 median
<a href="#">Summer housing and dining for full summer in a studio on campus</a>	\$2,700	\$8,100 for 3 summers
Average cost of materials for classes	\$250	\$2,000
<a href="#">GW's Aetna health insurance for the full year (including summers)</a>	\$2,180	\$8,720
Estimated cost of flight to Washington, D.C. <a href="#">Student visa application fee</a>	\$1,200	One time payment \$160 One time payment

**Total estimated cost for one student for 4 years of undergraduate education: \$323,300**

## Funding Option 1: Departmental Tuition Remissions

If one GWU department each year agreed to waive tuition for one student's four year education, a refugee student could be admitted to a new department each year on a rotating basis. The Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students uses this model; each department agrees to waive tuition for 30 displaced students each year, and this commitment is what has allowed for such a sustainable and effective scholarship.

*Student fee*

Each year, students pay \$3.00 per credit hour towards a student fee<sup>9</sup> which goes towards funding student organizations; a fee that totals an average of \$45.00 per full-time student. If GWU has 12,484 students,<sup>10</sup> the remaining \$84,180 needed for this scholarship could be funded if **\$6.74** were added to that Student Association student fee and maintained in relation to tuition each year.

**Funding Option 2: The Half-Quarter-Quarter Model**

*Independent donations*

Donations from GWU alumni and other independent donors can make up a fund to cover 50 percent of the total scholarship, contributing **\$161,650** to the scholarship each year. These funds can be held in the non-profit *Global Educators Network* and accumulate over time.

*Student fee*

As stated above, each year, students pay \$3.00 per credit hour towards a student fee<sup>11</sup> which goes towards funding student organizations; a fee that totals an average of \$45.00 per full-time student. If GWU has 12,484 students<sup>12</sup> a quarter (25 percent) of the Welcoming Campus scholarship would be funded if **\$6.47** were added to that Student Association student fee and maintained in relation to tuition each year.

*University support*

<sup>9</sup> Fees and Charges, GW Student Accounts: Finance Division, <https://studentaccounts.gwu.edu/fees-charges><sup>10</sup> "George Washington University." US News. <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/george-washington-university-1444#:~:text=George%20Washington%20University%20is%20a,campus%20size%20is%2043%20acres.>

<sup>11</sup> Fees and Charges, GW Student Accounts: Finance Division, <https://studentaccounts.gwu.edu/fees-charges>

<sup>12</sup>“George Washington University.” US News.

<https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/george-washington-university-1444#:~:text=George%20Washington%20University%20is%20a,campus%20size%20is%2043%20acres.>

6

If the university could match this 25 percent contribution from each student, a total of **\$80,825**, the full scholarship for one refugee student for four years of study would be able to be covered in one year. This would enable a new refugee student to enter the university each year.

### **Funding Option 3: Host Family Housing**

In order to remove the cost of dining and housing, select community members in the Foggy Bottom-area could volunteer to housing and feeding scholarship recipients for 1-4 years of their studies. The resulting total needing to be covered without the inclusion of housing and dining would be \$259,300, which could be provided in any combination of the above methods.

*Note: aspects of each of these options could be combined based on the needs and development of this scholarship program. Additionally, partial scholarships using any of the above funding methods would be effective for supporting domestic resettled refugees.*

### **Application Process**

Many students with refugee backgrounds have experienced disruptions in their education because of displacement, and may have trouble procuring a formal transcript to provide for applications, among other barriers. These special circumstances must be accounted for in the application review process.

#### *Application review board*

Refugee students will apply to GWU through the Common Application, as well as a separate scholarship application which will include two additional essay questions. Applicants to this program will be pulled from the general admissions process, and an independent board will review applicants based on their applications to the scholarship, and through the Common Application. This board will then sort through applications based on guidelines from training and criteria specifically for admissions policies inclusive of refugee students (read: *Transcript requirements* and *Standardized testing requirements* below for more information) before sending a select 12 applications to the general GWU undergraduate admissions team. This admissions board will consist of two GWU faculty members, two GWU admissions officers, two students (holding the position on a two year rotation), and two *Welcoming Campus Support Team* members (see pages 12-13), all of whom will complete this work voluntarily. Once the board selects 12 applicants, they will write letters on behalf of each applicant to the GWU admissions committee explaining any special circumstances (regarding lack of transcripts, disruptions in education, etc.) that they need to understand before they can conduct a comprehensive review of

### *Transcript requirements*

As stated above in “*Barriers to higher education access*,” many refugee students have experienced disruptions in their education, may not have access to official documents proving prior education, may have received education at unofficial institutions, etc. Thus, requiring a transcript to apply to GWU will restrict many refugee students from being considered. Several alternatives to transcript requirements have been developed, with two reports compiled in recent years outline potential substitutes for transcripts: World Education Services’ report entitled, “Recognizing Refugee Qualifications: Practical Tips for Credential Assessment” by Bryce Loo,<sup>13</sup> and “Inclusive Admissions Policies for Displaced and Vulnerable Students” by Melanie Gottlieb and Annetta Stroud.<sup>14</sup> Next to an official transcript, an unofficial or partial transcript is most likely to have the sufficient information to assess an applicant.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, institutions can verify past academic institutions using documents like applicant diplomas, certificates of completion, student ID cards, proof of tuition payment, copies of licenses, and statements of professional standing.<sup>16</sup> As for personal testaments with little formal documentation to back them up, institutions can request that applicants provide a sworn statement, or a written statement explaining an applicant’s background and circumstances. In such cases, institutions can have applicants sign affidavits or have documents notarized for more certification.<sup>17</sup> Assessing skill levels of applicants is up to the discretion of the institution and specific programs’ requirements, but assessments often take the form of examinations, samples of work, projects related to the field of intended study, or interviews with prospective professors.<sup>18</sup> With some corroboration and the proper training, admissions teams can construct encompassing transcript equivalents for refugee applicants.

### **Social Support**

While every student experiences a learning curve upon entering freshman year of college, students with refugee backgrounds will face significant cultural adjustments upon arriving on campus, and would benefit from mentorship and extra social support during the transition. Many of the programs that already exist at GWU to support students socially can be easily adapted to fit the needs of refugee students.

### *New Horizons*

<sup>13</sup> Loo, B. (2016). “Recognizing Refugee Qualifications: Practical Tips for Credential Assessment.” New York: World Education Services (WES)

<https://gtotalent.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Recognizing-Refugee-Credentials-Practical-Tips-for-Credential-Assessment.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Gottlieb, Melanie, and Annetta Stroud (Eds.). (2019). *Inclusive Admissions Policies for Displaced and Vulnerable Students*. Washington, DC: AACRAO: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. <sup>15</sup>

Loo, iv

<sup>16</sup> Loo, 9

<sup>17</sup> Loo, 10

<sup>18</sup> Loo, 13-16

No Lost Generation GWU's "New Horizons" program<sup>19</sup> works with junior and senior high school students with refugee status in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area to mentor them through the college application process and prepare them for the social and academic demands of college. The program has a full curriculum and training for mentors, and has operated virtually since fall, 2020. With some adjustments, this mentorship program could be adapted to a Welcoming Campus student from the time the student is accepted to the university, through the end of their first year at GWU. Mentors could start as juniors and continue through their graduation, providing social support to students, and connecting them with academic and career support as needed. This mentor, along with a "Welcoming Campus" team could welcome recipient students to Washington D.C. the summer before their first year at GWU and help them get to know their way around the city.

### *Pre-orientation programs*

It is important that Welcoming Campus students are connected with as many opportunities for social connections as possible in order to ensure a smooth transition into social and cultural life at GWU. Additionally, student visas can only be issued up to 30 days before the start of a program.<sup>20</sup> Pre-orientation programs can be solutions to both of these concerns. Leadership Exploration and Development,<sup>21</sup> Adventure Bound (which would require costs to be covered),<sup>22</sup> and Founding Scholars (if student is a first generation college student)<sup>23</sup> are all potentially beneficial programs to Welcoming Campus students.

### *Multicultural Student Services Center*

A partnership between the Welcoming Campus program and the Multicultural Student Services Center (MSSC) will provide support to Welcoming Campus students throughout their time at GWU. Having a physical space on campus dedicated to ensuring students of marginalized backgrounds get the support they need has already done so much to make GWU a more inclusive campus.

## **External Support**

<sup>19</sup> "New Horizons: College Mentorship." No Lost Generation GWU.

<https://nolostgenerationgw.wixsite.com/website/new-horizons>

<sup>20</sup> 83, International Refugee Assistance Project. (2020). "Expanding Complementary Pathways for Refugees and Displaced Persons: A Blueprint for the U.S. Government."

<https://refugeerights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Expanding-Complementary-Pathways-for-Refugees-and-Displaced-Persons-A-Blueprint-for-the-U.S.-Government.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> "LEAD." Office of Student Life: Division for Student Affairs. <https://studentlife.gwu.edu/lead>

<sup>22</sup> "Adventure Bound." Office of Student Life: Division for Student Affairs.



There are several nonprofit organizations who have existing relationships with GWU students through the No Lost Generation GWU, and could support refugee students and the Welcoming Campus Initiative.

*AsylumWorks*<sup>24</sup> is a D.C.-based organization that provides social, professional, and legal support to asylum seekers throughout the process of applying for asylum. AsylumWorks has had a positive partnership with GW students through No Lost Generation GWU since 2016, and have been consistent in their commitment to supporting asylum seekers through holding job training sessions, community-building events, and one-on-one legal support. AsylumWorks would be a valuable resource for guiding Welcoming Campus students through the asylum application process, connecting with job opportunities during and after their undergraduate experience, and finding community in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area.

*Student Voices for Refugees (SVR)*<sup>25</sup> is an initiative out of the University Alliance for Refugees and at-Risk Migrants (UARRM) that has been working since June 2020 to promote scholarship and mentorship programs for refugee students at U.S. campuses. The organization has completed multi-disciplinary research, engaging non-profit leaders, university administrators, students with refugee backgrounds, and other community leaders to draft an education campaign around best practices for scholarship and mentorship programs. This campaign can serve as a guide to the Welcoming Campus team, and SVR leaders can provide mentorship to the Welcoming Campus Team.

*Global Educator Network*<sup>26</sup> is a 501(c)(3) organization that has committed to holding all funds raised on behalf of GWU’S Welcoming Campus Initiative and providing access to them as necessary.

## **Welcoming Campus Support Team**

A team of volunteers dedicated to supporting the Welcoming Campus Initiative will be crucial to coordinating all of the moving pieces of the program. The three primary roles of the team are as follows:

### *Welcoming students to campus*

The first few weeks of a refugee student’s life on campus will be crucial to setting the tone for their adjustment to the school and the country. In order to ensure students are supported, the Welcoming Campus Team will set up students’ dorms before arrival (bedsheets, decorations, etc. can be collected via donations to an Amazon wishlist), picking them up at the airport, and providing them with a hot and culturally-appropriate meal upon arrival. In the weeks leading up to the first semester, the Welcoming Campus Team will be responsible for showing Welcoming

<sup>24</sup> AsylumWorks, <https://asylumworks.org/>

<sup>25</sup> “Student Voices for Refugees.” UARRM. <https://www.uarrm.org/student-voices>

<sup>26</sup> Global Educator Network, <https://www.globaleducatornetwork.org/>

Campus students around the city, ensuring they have basic necessities accounted for, and are emotionally prepared for the start of the semester.

### *Asylum support*

These skills would be required solely in cases of international refugee or domestic asylum seeker students. The team should have some knowledge of the asylum process and be able to connect students with the proper legal pathways and guidance to successfully file for asylum. Additionally, team members will be responsible for following up with students on the progress of their applications.

### *Admissions support*

As stated in the “*Application review board*” section above, two Welcoming Campus Team members will serve on an application review board during the admissions process. Additionally, this team will decide which refugee camp to draw applicants from each year.

### *Financial security*

Team members will keep track of the finances of the program, organizing fundraisers and negotiating with the GWU administration when necessary with the goal of maintaining a sustainable scholarship.

## **Long-term goal: Welcoming Campus Consortium**

Higher education access as a complementary pathway to refugee resettlement is a rapidly growing and in-demand field. The Welcoming Campus program will be the first of its kind, setting a national standard for higher education institution engagement in groundbreaking humanitarian work. While Welcoming Campus at GWU could be the pilot program, the model that we create could be cultivated at campuses across the country, establishing a consortium in which students could access cross-campus resources, have community based on cohorts, all while increasing refugee resettlement pathways to the U.S. in a time when resettlement is direly needed. These expansion efforts would be led by University Alliance for Refugees and at-Risk Migrants’ Student Voices for Refugees <sup>27</sup>team, who has worked since June 2020 to promote scholarship and mentorship initiatives for refugee students at universities across the country.

<sup>27</sup> “Student Voices for Refugees.” UARRM. <https://www.uarm.org/student-voices>