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# Students at the Margins and the Institutions that Serve Them: A Global Perspective

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## Salzburg Margins Buster Awards

Educational Testing Service and the Center on Minority Serving Institutions at the University of Pennsylvania is offering four \$2500 awards to “Margin Busters”.

Launched as part of their partnership with Salzburg Global Seminar for the program *Students at the Margins and the Institutions that Serve Them: A Global Perspective*, the two organizations are offering seed grants to four projects proposed by Salzburg Global Fellows that will tackle the marginalization of students from a variety of sectors of society and promote their inclusion in and access to higher education. Fellows are especially encouraged to collaborate across international borders on their proposed projects.

Further information will be shared with the Fellows at the end of the five-day Salzburg program.

## Calling all bloggers!

If you're interested in writing either an op-ed style article or a personal reflection blog post for our website [SalzburgGlobal.org](http://SalzburgGlobal.org) whilst you're here this week, please let Salzburg Global Editor, Louise Hallman know or email your submission directly to [lhallman@salzburgglobal.org](mailto:lhallman@salzburgglobal.org).

If you intend to write for your own organization's website or publication either whilst you're here or after the session, please make sure to observe the **Chatham House Rule** (information on which is in your Welcome Pack). If you're in any doubt, please do not hesitate to contact Louise.

You can also join in the conversation on Twitter with the hashtag [#SalzburgMSI](https://twitter.com/SalzburgMSI) and see all your fellow Fellows on Twitter via the list: [www.twitter.com/salzburgglobal/lists/SGS-53Z](http://www.twitter.com/salzburgglobal/lists/SGS-53Z)



Michael Nettles and Marybeth Gasman open the Salzburg Global program on minority serving institutions

## First global conference on minority serving institutions opens in Salzburg

The first ever international conference on minority serving institutions has opened in Salzburg.

Hosted at the historic palace of Schloss Leopoldskron by Salzburg Global Seminar, in partnership with Educational Testing Services and the Center on Minority Serving Institutions at the University of Pennsylvania, and sponsored by the Kresge Foundation, the program *Students at the Margins and the Institutions that Serve Them: A Global Perspective* is the first of its kind.

Minority serving institutions (MSIs) exist all over the world – albeit they may not all refer to themselves as such. Whilst there is much research being conducted on and many networking opportunities offered for MSIs, especially the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs), in the US, there does not currently exist a *global* forum for like-minded institutions to come together to learn about and from each other and collaborate on better ways to serve their respective minority communities.

In addition to institutions that specifically serve minorities, the

program will also address how “mainstream” institutions can better serve all marginalized students, be they minorities, first generation, low-income, undocumented students, adult learners, veterans, and refugees, amongst others.

Marginalized students are not always the minority; as one participant from South Africa pointed out, in her country “the margins make up nearly the whole circle.” Another participant asked: “Who decides the margins?”

Opening the session, co-chairs Michael Nettles, senior vice president of ETS and Marybeth Gasman, UPenn professor and director of the Center on Minority Serving Institutions both spoken not only of the professional but also the personal interest and investment they had in the session's topic (Nettles as a child of HCBU-attending parents and Gasman as the first and only of ten children from her poor rural family to attend college), and they urged the more than 50 participants to move outside of their comfort zones this week and find potential collaborators beyond their usual sectors and national boundaries.



Panelists Jennifer Cordova-James, president of the Student Executive Board at Northwest Indian College and Neil Sparnon, chief academic officer with the Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins. Two graduates of JC: HEM were unable to attend the session due to difficulties obtaining visas.

## “Help students know who they are to help them know where they’re going”

Minority serving institutions should “Help students know who they are to help them know where they’re going,” urged student and Salzburg Global program panelist Jennifer Cordova-James.

Cordova-James was speaking on the opening panel of the Salzburg Global program *Students at the Margins and the Institutions that Serve Them: A Global Perspective*, during which she shared her experiences of being a student at a minority serving institution, Northwest Indian College (NWIC), in Washington state, USA.

Addressing the audience of more than 50 Salzburg Global Fellows (many of whom not only work for but are also graduates of minority serving institutions, primarily Historically Black Colleges and Universities – HCBUs), Cordova-James explained that as a member of the Tlingit tribe of Alaska and from the people of the Condor from South America, attending a TCU (Tribal College and University) not only gives her the academic grounding expected from a higher education institution but also helps her learn more about and better understand her own culture

and heritage, thus enabling her to go on to better serve her community in the future.

In addition to extra-curricular activities that incorporate traditional sports and crafts, students at NWIC are able to pursue specialist subjects; Cordova-James is undertaking a B.A. in tribal governance and business management.

NWIC offers much lower tuition than is typical of a US college, making it possible for Cordova-James to attend. The college also offers student support services specially tailored to the community it serves, helping students tackle the sometimes hostile reactions they receive from others in their community who accuse them of turning their back on tradition by pursuing higher education.

By attending a minority serving institution rather than a “mainstream” college, Cordova-James is able to not only pursue a specialized degree, she is also surrounded by like-minded students.

As one participant pointed out, one of the greatest benefits of attending a minority serving institution is the opportunity for students from cultural

and ethnic minorities to no longer be a minority; they typically form the majority of the student body of such institutions.

Indeed, this is one of the purposes of the second panelist, Neil Sparnon’s organization, Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins. JC: HEM, of which Sparnon is the chief academic officer, offers higher education to refugees in Africa. The program, Spornan explains, enables students – who would not have access otherwise – to receive their education in a setting where their refugee status does not mark them out as different.

The JC: HEM curriculum focuses on skills such as critical thinking, academic writing and communication, rather than simply teaching students specific academic subjects.

“We give them the skills; the application is up to them,” he explained.

But for all the opportunities such skills can offer graduates, they can still find themselves marginalized.

Two graduates of JC: HEM programs, Gustave Lwaba, a Congolese refugee in Malawi and Daniel Christian Emerimana, a refugee in Kenya, had been slated to appear on the same panel; however, they were unable to get travel visas.

“Students at the margins don’t have the same rights,” Spornan reminded the audience.