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I was fortunate enough to be able to attend the Anacapa Synthesis Unit, *Human Migration: The Search for a Better Life*. The panelists included several PhDs from UCSB’s departments of Geography, History, and English, as well as the Climate Hazards Group. The discussion of migration patterns opened with the often overlooked role of agricultural land use choices as well as the role of climate change and weather patterns as a primary force in displacing people across the globe. We learned about German-Jewish refugees in the 1930’s, medieval immigrants to Paris, Native American forced migration under Andrew Jackson, and the concept of historical human identity as, precisely that: a concept that is created in the mind.

The full magic of Skype was on display as we “met” two speakers with real-world experience in human migration. The first was Christina Manriquez from the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM). The PRM, which is part of the U.S. Department of State, is responsible for resettling up to 70,000 refugees annually in the United States. Ms. Manriquez walked us through the two-year process whereby PRM identifies, screens, and resettles the most vulnerable people in the refugee population.

A second Skype panelist, Edward Joseph, directs the institute of Current World Affairs which sends young people to various countries for two year periods with the long-term aim of managing and resolving international conflict. He spoke of his experiences in bringing aid to the people of the Balkans during the conflicts of the 1990s. Appearing on the big screen in Elliott, it felt like these speakers were actually in the room with us.

We also heard from John Klink, who works with the Catholic Church, aiding refugees through its official migration organization. Mr. Klink explained to us that half of Syrians are now homeless, that Syrian refugees constitute 25% of refugees globally, and that the vast majority of Syrian refugees are in settlements in the developing countries that border Syria. Marina Andina, another State Department representative with the PRM, showed us what it was like for her to be “on the ground” in refugee centers across the globe where she met with and interviewed refugees and processed their paperwork for a decade.

Bringing the migrant issue back home, Michael Jimeno, a United States Border Patrol agent described the impressive array of new, high-tech tools agents now have at their disposal. However, I learned after the talk that agents in the field still work alone, even while completing extremely dangerous assignments, due to funding limitations.

Finally, we heard from the Deputy Consul of Italy Paolo Pandolfi about how the Italian government, in concert with European Union authorities, is managing the influx of migrants that are coming into Italy and crossing through Italy on their way to other European destinations.

As a historian and a former educator, as well as a parent, I thought that Anacapa School's Synthesis Unit was an educational triumph. The unit succeeded on many levels. Primarily, it countered the emotionally charged dialogue on the topic that seems to be the norm in so many mainstream debates and publications. Much anxiety accompanies the very difficult issues that surround migrant populations. The prejudice, stereotyping, ignorance, poverty, fear and violence that are associated with mass migration too often lead to emotional appeals by people with some sort of media platform. By examining the facts and the numbers, and by sketching a broad historical context, students were given tools to comprehend the unseen forces behind the events that are unfolding today. As an educator, I know that the learning I observed over the three days of talks leads not just to the mastery of subject matter. More importantly, it cultivates the sober habits of mind that students can carry with them, and rely upon in the future.

Clearly the students displayed the intellectual readiness and the maturity to use those tools and to synthesize the material, which had great range and depth, as well as subtlety. No matter how uncomfortable the topics were, the atmosphere in the room was always comfortable. The students were respectful of the material, respectful of the panelists, respectful of their teachers and respectful of each other. There is an atmosphere of purposeful activity at Anacapa, and an easy camaraderie amongst the students that was always on display during the breaks between speakers. This is clearly a healthy, balanced and inclusive learning environment, where personal achievement and mindfulness of others happily coexist. This kind of harmony does not appear accidentally. As headmaster, Gordon has clearly defined the culture, and the social and academic expectations at Anacapa. He and all of the faculty members are obviously respected by the students. Largely, I think, this is because they model the respect that they wish to see.

Higher education is a serious business, but the kids, being kids, are allowed to have fun too. In ever-shifting clusters I could see that they were clearly enjoying their life on campus and each other. Surveying the campus at break time, I turned to Gordon and said: "Forget about Disneyland. This is the happiest place on earth."