

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARLY ENGAGEMENT

DISCUSSION PAPER

**MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF
INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

September 2022

SUMMARY: The ASPA President's Committee on International Scholarly Engagement (PCISE) was established in January 2022. Members of the committee are listed on the next page. Its goal is to provide guidance on how organizations can engage internationally while respecting academic freedom, human rights, and other core values. In this discussion paper, the PCISE proposes a general approach to international engagement based on examples of actual challenges, consultation with international experts and a review of institutional practices. It invites comments, which can be sent to the committee co-chairs. The committee's final report will be released in January 2023.

This paper is one of a number of discussion papers and reports commissioned by ASPA that seek to address important cross-cutting issues for the the field of public administration. The Association welcomes suggestions on future issues and/or topics in this regard.

PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARLY ENGAGEMENT

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CHALLENGES IN INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

International engagement is an essential part of scholarly work in public administration. Only by reaching across national borders can we build reliable knowledge about the role, practices, and performance of government. International engagement happens in many ways, such as:

- Informal dialogue and collaboration among scholars;
- Conferences and other activities of scholarly associations;
- Publication in internationally oriented journals;
- Accreditation processes; and
- University partnerships.

However, international engagement also poses distinctive challenges when it involves work in jurisdictions whose governments disrespect academic freedom and fundamental human rights. These challenges are not new, but they have intensified in recent years. Many countries have witnessed a resurgence of authoritarianism and new assaults on human rights. For scholars and institutions committed to human rights and academic freedom, this shift in conditions creates an imperative for clear thinking about the aims and forms of international engagement.

The ASPA Presidential Committee on International Scholarly Engagement (PCISE) was established in January 2022 to provide advice on how organizations that are engaged in scholarly work in the field of public administration — including associations, journals, and teaching programs — should approach challenges in international engagement. Our advice is designed to be applicable to organizations globally and not limited to US-based organizations looking outward, but rather to any scholarly organization considering engagement outside their own jurisdiction. Indeed, many organizations in our field describe themselves as international or global, in which case all of their engagement is international in character.

Our aim is not to prescribe rules about what is and is not appropriate. Our work is more foundational. We wish to:

- Suggest a framework for thinking about engagement, which identifies the values at stake and ways in which these values may collide in practice; and
- Identify mechanisms by which organizations can make better decisions about international engagement.

The PCISE organized several conversations at conferences on this topic over the course of 2022. We have also consulted with organization representatives and specialists on engagement, and commissioned background papers on key issues. More information about the committee's work can be found on its website, aspaengage.blog. The committee will produce a report in January 2023.

CHALLENGES IN ENGAGEMENT: SOME EXAMPLES

The work of the committee is motivated by a number of challenges that have confronted academic organizations in public administration and related fields in recent years.

Here are examples:

- Sometimes, associations have decided to hold conferences in jurisdictions where it is claimed that human rights are not adequately respected. Members have protested about these decisions, arguing that they may be maltreated if they attend a conference, or that attendance may be construed as an endorsement of government policy. In a few instances, conferences have been cancelled or relocated in response to such protests.¹
- Organizations have been called upon to make statements condemning governmental actions that infringe human rights and academic freedom. But many organizations lack policies and procedures for making such statements. The result is that organizations sometimes appear to make unjustified or inconsistent decisions about the issuance or content of statements.²
- International accrediting bodies are asked to accredit degree programs in countries with governments that are accused of human rights abuses and infringements of academic freedom. Accrediting bodies do not appear to have clear procedures for weighing these factors while making accreditation decisions.³
- Journals sometimes receive manuscripts from scholars working in jurisdictions where academic freedom is not respected. But journals appear to lack procedures for determining whether research is compromised for this reason, or responding appropriately. Recently, journals have debated about whether to accept manuscripts from Russian institutions whose leaders have publicly endorsed the invasion of Ukraine.⁴ In addition, journals outsource production to developing countries, without investigating conditions of employment in those countries, as many multinational enterprises are expected to do.⁵ Similarly, many journals partner with multinational publishing corporations without investigating whether these corporations have adopted policies on respect for human rights.
- Universities sometimes partner with institutions in jurisdictions where human rights and academic freedom may be threatened. Controversies about such partnerships have sometimes arisen.⁶ In some instances, universities have lacked policies that explain how teachers and students will be protected, or standards for determining whether partnerships have the effect of legitimizing government policies.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our conversations, and the workshops we have organized since March 2022, suggest some basic principles for thinking about engagement:

- There are no simple rules that will allow organizations to avoid challenges in international engagement. Deciding what to do in a particular situation depends on the facts, and on weighing values that often conflict with one another. Reasonable people may disagree about the right course of action in a particular case.
- Nevertheless, we all have an obligation to think carefully about international engagement. Moral responsibility requires that we identify values, gather facts, and explain our reasoning.
- Organizations are more likely to make sound decisions if they anticipate challenges and develop routines for addressing them. Although some scholarly bodies have begun to think proactively about engagement, most organizations in our field are not adequately prepared to make sound and consistent decisions about engagement.

EMERGING BEST PRACTICE

We believe that questions about international engagement are more likely to be handled properly if they are addressed deliberately. Important values and principles should be explicitly stated, and mechanisms should be established to assure that values and principles are respected. In fact, this is the emerging best practice in many organizations. For example:

Some universities have adopted codes or guidelines on international engagement.⁷ In the United Kingdom, the Academic Freedom and Internationalization Working Group has also drafted a model code of conduct for universities. Although these codes and guidelines vary in content, common features include:

- A statement of core values relating to international engagement,
- Best-practice recommendations relating to specific forms of engagement, and
- Creation of an office, committee, or council that is responsible for assuring attention to core values and providing advice in complex cases.

More narrowly, some academic organizations in related fields have adopted formal policies that identify the criteria and procedures that will be applied to determine whether a statement should be made on a matter of public controversy.⁸ These policies assure carefulness and consistency in decision-making.

We can also learn something from initiatives taken to improve responsible engagement by multinational corporations. For example, 23 major multinational companies are members of the Global Business Initiative on Human Rights and more than two hundred corporations are included in the Corporate Human Rights Benchmark (CHRB) launched by the World Benchmarking Alliance in 2017.

Criteria included in the Benchmark include:

- Whether a corporation has adopted explicit policy commitments on human rights,
- Whether there is a board member or committee responsible for monitoring compliance with commitments throughout the corporation,
- Whether the corporation has taken steps to embed its commitments in systems and processes, and
- Whether the corporation has mechanisms for addressing complaints about non-compliance with policy commitments.⁹

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our conversations, and our study of emerging practices, we have four recommendations that apply to all academic organizations in the field of public administration:

- . Organizations should have an open conversation about the values that guide their international engagement, and publish a statement of their core values. We describe relevant core values identified by the PCISE in the Appendix.
- Organizations should assure that staff and volunteers are familiar with the core values that guide engagement, and assure that these values are explicitly accounted for in key decision-making processes within the organization.
- Academic organizations should consider appointing an individual or committee with responsibility for:
 - a. reviewing organizational activities to determine whether core values are respected, and
 - b. addressing concerns about potentially problematic cases of engagement.
- Procedures for addressing concerns about engagement should be designed to assure accuracy, fairness, and transparency in decision-making.

APPENDIX

KEY VALUES IN INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Decisions about engagement are difficult because several values are at play, and often in conflict. Our first recommendation is that organizations should develop a policy on engagement that identifies their core values and procedures for making assuring that they are respected. Here, we suggest what some of these core values might be. These six values that were frequently raised during conversations hosted by the committee in 2022:

- ***Promoting dialogue and understanding.*** We should seek opportunities to engage with scholars and practitioners in other jurisdictions. By doing this we enhance our knowledge about public administration and improve the capacity of all governments to provide critical public services.
- ***Protecting academic freedom.*** Academic freedom, defined broadly as the freedom in research, in the publication of results, and in teaching and other forms of speech, is essential to our work.¹⁰ We should assure that our own academic freedom is not infringed during engagement. We should determine whether academic freedom is respected and promote it where possible.
- ***Respect for human rights.*** Fundamental human rights are enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and many other internationally recognized documents. We should avoid engagements that would have the effect of supporting practices that seriously infringe human rights, or which might be construed as condoning infringement of human rights.
- ***Supporting the development of scholarly capacity.*** We should support the development of capacities of scholarly organizations, especially in places that have historically been excluded from the global conversation on public administration.
- ***Respect for the self-determination of communities.*** As we engage with scholars and practitioners in other jurisdictions, we should respect the right of communities to make their own choices about government. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966, says: “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”
- ***Protecting the safety and dignity of colleagues.*** Jurisdictions may not do enough to protect individuals from attack or persecution because of race, faith, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other factors. When we organize conferences or other activities that require colleagues to visit certain places, we should consider whether their safety and dignity will be protected.
- ***Accuracy, fairness, and transparency in decision-making.*** Decisions to engage internationally, or to refrain from engagement, may be contested, and they may impose harms on colleagues. We should make sure that we have all the facts before making significant decisions; that we have allowed interested parties to contribute their views; and that we have explained the rationale for our actions.

ENDNOTES

¹ The American Association for the Advancement of Science moved its 1979 convention from Chicago because Illinois had not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment, and its 1999 convention from Denver when the state constitution was amended to permit discrimination based on sexual orientation. In 2012, the American Political Science Association debated whether to relocate its conference scheduled for New Orleans because of the risk that attendees who were in same-sex partnerships would not be allowed to visit their partner in hospital in an emergency. The International Political Science Association moved its 2016 conference from Istanbul in response to government actions that threatened academic freedom and civil liberties. In 2017, the Public Management Research Association moved its conference from North Carolina after concerns were raised about the state legislature's adoption of a law discriminating against transgender persons. In 2020, the American Physical Society said that would consider police conduct when choosing cities for future conventions.

² For example, some organizations made statements condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, while critics observed that these organizations had remained silent about instances of aggression elsewhere in the world.

³ For example, NASPAA has accredited several graduate programs in non-democratic states. Academic freedom is not explicitly counted as a prerequisite for NASPAA accreditation. Nor are accredited programs required to respect human rights. While the International Commission on the Accreditation of Public Administration Education and Training Programs (ICAPA) indicates in its self-assessment directions to programs seeking accreditation that they must demonstrate that they "are committed to the advancement of the public interest and the building of democratic institutions", they have accredited institutions that may not meet this requirement.

⁴ "Ukrainian researchers pressure journals to boycott Russian authors," *Nature*, March 14, 2022.

⁵ "Human rights in supply chains," *Human Rights Watch*, May 30, 2016.

⁶ For example: "AAUP letter outlines concerns about Yale's collaboration with Singapore," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 4, 2012; "NYU faculty members shun Abu Dhabi campus over academic freedom issues," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 6, 2017. Several organizations discontinued partnerships in Russia following the invasion of Ukraine.

⁷ We have provided links to some of these documents at <https://aspaengage.blog/2022/08/16/university-codes-and-guidelines/>.

⁸ Such as the American Historical Association, the American Sociological Association, and the American Anthropological Association.

⁹ The CHRB's methodology is described here: <https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/research/the-methodology-for-the-2022-corporate-human-rights-benchmark/>.

¹⁰ See the "Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure" adopted by the American Association of University Professors in 1940.