

# International Engagement: Respecting human rights and academic freedom

ASPA PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON  
INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARLY ENGAGEMENT

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## Background

- ▶ The ASPA President's Committee on International Scholarly Engagement (PCISE) was established in February 2022
- ▶ Goal is to provide guidance on how organizations can engage internationally while respecting academic freedom (AF), human rights (HR), and other espoused values

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## Committee members

- ▶ Co-chairs:
  - ▶ Alasdair Roberts, University of Massachusetts Amherst
  - ▶ Mary-Lee Rhodes, Trinity College Dublin
- ▶ **Members**
  - ▶ Mohamad Alkadry, University of Connecticut
  - ▶ Maria Aristigueta, Biden School
  - ▶ Nisha Botchwey, Humphrey School
  - ▶ Michael Brintnall, Montgomery College
  - ▶ György Hajnal, Corvinus University
  - ▶ Leslie Pal, Hamad Bin Khalifa University
  - ▶ Meghna Sabharwal, University of Texas Dallas

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## International Engagement

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;
- ▶ Student / researcher exchanges;
- ▶ and University partnerships.

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## The problem

- ▶ Engagement with scholars in other jurisdictions is essential
- ▶ But governments and institutions often disrespect democracy, human rights and academic freedom
- ▶ Engagement might:
  - ▶ Seem like an endorsement of objectionable practices
  - ▶ Support the continuation of objectionable practices
  - ▶ Result in the dissemination of flawed and biased research
  - ▶ Put community members at risk of maltreatment
- ▶ This problem appears to be growing, not shrinking
- ▶ Presently, we:
  - ▶ React to controversies rather than anticipating
  - ▶ Fail to treat cases consistently

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## Some examples

- ▶ When (if ever) should scholarly organizations (journals, associations, universities) make statements about current affairs?
- ▶ Should HR & AF considerations (amongst others) affect the location of conferences?
- ▶ Should journal editors consider the effects of AF restrictions on incoming content? Should they attend to HR considerations in their production chain?
- ▶ Should HR&AF considerations affect accreditation decisions; student & scholar exchanges?

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## Work plan

- ▶ Terms of reference available
- ▶ Plan to hold discussions throughout 2022
  - ▶ ASPA session March 19, 2022
  - ▶ Webinars March 30 and April 20, 2022
  - ▶ Sessions at scholarly conferences May-November
  - ▶ NAPA panel on December 2, 2022
- ▶ Background papers available online - <https://aspaengage.blog>
- ▶ Discussion Paper available online - <https://aspaengage.blog>
- ▶ Final report early 2023

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## Committee's approach

- ▶ Premise -- we will do better if we:
  - ▶ Anticipate challenges in engagement
  - ▶ Develop a framework for identifying & weighing core values
  - ▶ Develop routines for deciding consistently and transparently about cases
- ▶ Aim: to frame and advance conversation
- ▶ The aim is not to set rules about engagement
- ▶ We are not interested only in US engagement abroad
- ▶ We do not assume that any country is above criticism
- ▶ Our work may be relevant within countries, too

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## Recommendations

- ▶ Organizations should have an open conversation and publish a statement of the values that guide engagement.
- ▶ Organizations should assure that staff and volunteers are familiar with core values and assure that these values are explicitly accounted for in decision-making processes.
- ▶ Academic organizations should consider appointing an individual or committee with responsibility for:
  - ▶ reviewing organizational activities to determine whether core values are respected, and
  - ▶ addressing concerns about potentially problematic cases of engagement.
- ▶ Procedures for addressing concerns about engagement should assure accuracy, fairness, and transparency in decision-making.

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## Key values, in brief

- ▶ Promoting dialogue and understanding.
- ▶ Protecting academic freedom.
- ▶ Respect for human rights.
- ▶ Supporting the development of scholarly capacity.
- ▶ Respect for the self-determination of communities.
- ▶ Protecting the safety and dignity of colleagues.
- ▶ Accuracy, fairness, and transparency in decision-making.

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"The question it addresses is how the Institute and other American research universities should engage with organizations and individuals in countries whose political leaders are pursuing policies that are irreconcilable with basic human rights and values and that pose security risks to the United States.

"This report charts a path for MIT's future relations with China. It recommends an approach that **combines selective engagement with targeted risk assessment and management.**"



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