



PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARLY ENGAGEMENT

REPORT

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

January 2023

SUMMARY: The ASPA President's Committee on International Scholarly Engagement (PCISE) was established by ASPA President Allan Rosenbaum in January 2022. Its goal is to provide guidance on how organizations can engage internationally while respecting academic freedom, human rights, and other core values. The PCISE conducted background research, interviewed organization leaders, and held several discussion sessions with a range of stakeholders over 2022. It recommends that scholarly organizations make clear the core values that guide their international engagement, take steps to embed those values in decision-making processes, and develop processes for addressing concerns about engagement that are evidence-based, fair, and transparent. In addition, we describe seven examples of core values that scholarly organizations might consider as a first step in developing their approach to international engagement.

This report is one of a number of discussion papers and reports commissioned by ASPA that seek to address important cross-cutting issues for 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 for education and research.

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. COVID-19 and the shift to online teaching has increased the exposure of teachers and students across the world to monitoring from their own and foreign governments. 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 not limited to US-based organizations with engagements abroad. It is applicable to organizations in any country that have commitments in other jurisdictions.

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 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 PCISE adopted this report in January 2023. The report was endorsed by the National Council of the American Society for Public Administration in February 2023. It was also endorsed by the Public Administration Committee of the Joint University Council of the United Kingdom 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:

- Associations have planned 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 in cases where research appears to be compromised. 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, as recommended by some non-governmental standard-setting organizations.
- 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 organized in 2022, produced 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 engagement⁷, 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. Several universities have adopted codes or guidelines on international engagement.⁸ 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 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.⁹ These policies assure carefulness and consistency in decision-making about their statements on questions of public policy.

We can also learn from initiatives taken to improve responsible engagement by multinational corporations. The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) endorsed by the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in 2011 includes the recommendation that business enterprises adopt a policy commitment to respect human rights, as well as a due diligence process to identify their impacts on human rights and steps to prevent or mitigate those impacts.¹⁰

The Corporate Human Rights Benchmark (CHRB) launched by the World Benchmarking Alliance in 2017 assesses the extent to which over one hundred corporations have explicit statements and policies on their compliance with the UNGPs.

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.¹¹

KEY VALUES IN INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Decisions about engagement are difficult because several values are at play, and often in conflict. These six values were frequently raised during conversations hosted by the committee in 2022. They are not ranked by order of importance:

- *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.¹² We should assure that our own academic freedom is not infringed during engagement. We should determine whether academic freedom is respected and promote it in whatever way 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.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Organizations should have an open conversation about the values that guide their international engagement, and they should publish a statement of their core values and processes for ensuring their expression in the policies and practices of the organization. We identified some core values in the previous section. Organizations may wish to amend our list, or define these values in their own way.
2. 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.
3. 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. receiving and responding to concerns about potentially problematic cases of engagement.
4. Procedures for addressing concerns about engagement should be designed to assure accuracy, fairness, and transparency in decision-making.

NOTES

¹ The American Association for the Advancement of Science moved its 1979 convention from Chicago because the state of 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. 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."

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 See recent statement from MIT on its approach to engagement with China: <https://global.mit.edu/about/report-by-the-mit-china-strategy-group/>.

⁸ We have provided links to some of these documents at <https://aspaengage.blog/2022/08/16/university-codes-and-guidelines/>. For an argument about the need for university guidelines, see: Fischer, Karen. "Do Colleges Need a Foreign Policy?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 22 2021.

⁹ Such as the American Historical Association, the American Sociological Association, and the American Anthropological Association.

¹⁰ <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/big-issues/un-guiding-principles-on-business-human-rights/>

¹¹ The CHRB's methodology is described here: <https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/research/the-methodology-for-the-2022-corporate-human-rights-benchmark/>.

¹² See the "Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure" adopted by the American Association of University Professors in 1940.