



# Memorandum

**Date:** April 9, 2015

**To:** NYU Faculty

**From:** Faculty Committee on NYU's Global Network

**Re:** Statement on Academic Freedom and Travel Restrictions

The UAE's refusal to allow Prof. Andrew Ross to enter that country has sparked a university-wide discussion about our university's efforts to establish a global network of academic excellence and integrity. Academic freedom is a universal and foundational value of such excellence. If the research of a faculty member is the reason a government acts to inhibit his or her freedom of movement, it constitutes a serious violation of a value we hold dear.

The committee is gravely concerned about the effects travel bans and other restrictions of movement could have on the research and scholarship of NYU faculty across the global network. We are grateful to our colleagues on the Faculty Senators Councils for their energetic and immediate response to the news, and we are encouraged by the university administration's assurance that it is investigating this case, along with the case of U.S. visa denial that happened around the same time.

As the faculty committee appointed to and charged with optimizing the academic quality of the university's global network, we are committed to understanding the larger implications and long-term consequences of this situation.

The university's global network was launched in a spirit of optimism and international collaboration. As it matures, it will inevitably encounter circumstances requiring deeper and more complex understandings of how to preserve our values while pursuing our goals. For example, this case suggests that anyone who has issued or expected a "guarantee" of free movement in the countries where we are building portals and sites has been mistaken. Sadly, no such guarantee exists in any part of the world, and all academic work, including research, faces frustrating legal and cultural constraints at the hands of governments the world over.

To acknowledge this fact, however, is not to renounce the commitment to improving this state of affairs wherever possible. On the contrary, acknowledging this reality—and its many variations within the international academic landscape—is a prerequisite for determining the best strategies for working to change it. Our committee has been informing itself about the systems, mechanisms, and procedures that are being developed at our new portal

campuses in response to this question, and we are confident that these represent real progress in safeguarding academic and creative freedom there.

This is part of the crucial fact that the global network has advanced to a stage where we now have faculty colleagues and administrations in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai who have been successfully negotiating the academic landscape in those places, and are in a position to offer valuable and nuanced perspectives on the best strategies for protecting and enhancing academic freedom.

To ensure that this topic and this case receive the most serious attention and generate as much knowledge and clarity as possible across the global network, we propose the following courses of action:

1. We will ask the Office of the Provost to provide the Committee with a comprehensive report regarding impediments to mobility and restrictions to academic entry-seekers (including faculty, students, staff and administrators) across the global network (including New York). We will also ask the Office of the Provost to update this report annually. The Committee is especially interested in knowing how many scholars have encountered obstacles in traveling to NYU portals and sites, and for what reasons (if they are known).
2. We call upon the NYUAD and NYUSH leadership and faculty to continue their efforts to negotiate the academic landscapes of their campuses, with a heightened focus on the need for visa policies that do not undermine the academic and artistic freedom necessary for the functioning of a world-class research university.
3. We request a more comprehensive public response from the university administration both on the details of the Andrew Ross ban and the problems that travel restrictions create for developing a workable global network. While we understand the delicacy of the relationship between NYU and its UAE partners, the official response to the Andrew Ross ban has left many questions unanswered. We further ask that the university administration keep us apprised of what they learn from their inquiries about the reasons for the ban.
4. In collaboration with the Faculty Senators Councils, we will hold a series of inter-portal faculty forums (linking colleagues in Abu Dhabi, Shanghai, and New York) to inform ourselves as fully as possible about the realities the network faces and to identify the strategies and best practices we can adopt to safeguard academic and artistic freedom and facilitate mobility across the network.
5. Professor Ross was traveling to Abu Dhabi outside the official channels of the global network and with no connection to the program at NYUAD. We intend to find out what protections might or might not have been afforded to someone in his circumstances (that is, a member of the NYU faculty) while working under the aegis of NYU/NYUAD.