



# NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

**Faculty Committee on the Global Network  
Wednesday, December 6, 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.  
Presidential Conference Room, Bobst Library**

## **MEMBERS PARTICIPATING IN THE MEETING**

**Eliot Borenstein**, FAS (Russian & Slavic Studies) *Co-Chair*

**Martin Klimke**, NYU Abu Dhabi, *Co-Chair*

**Sylvain Cappell**, Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences

**Alexander Geppert**, NYU Shanghai

**Guido Gerig**, Tandon School of Engineering

**Sam Howard-Spink**, Continuing Contract Faculty Senators Council

**Dale Hudson**, NYU Abu Dhabi

**Matthew Kleban**, FAS (Physics)

**Kristie Koenig**, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

**Rachel Law**, Student Senators Council

**Heather Lee**, NYU Shanghai

**Teboho Moja**, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

**Yaw Nyarko**, Provostial At-Large Liaison

**Daniel Perkins**, Division of Libraries

**Scott Sherman**, School of Medicine

**Tazuko Shibusawa**, Silver School of Social Work

**Paul Smoke**, Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

**Carol Sternhell**, FAS (Journalism)

**Marti Subrahmanyam**, Leonard N. Stern School of Business

**Joseph Weiler**, School of Law

## Guests

**Al Bloom**, Vice Chancellor, NYU Abu Dhabi

**Fabio Piano**, Provost, NYU Abu Dhabi

## **MEETING NOTES**

Eliot Borenstein welcomed the committee and thanked guests Al Bloom (Vice Chancellor, NYU AD) and Fabio Piano (Provost, NYU AD) for attending. Martin Klimke asked Piano and Bloom about the visa application process for faculty invited to work at NYUAD.

1. Who at NYUAD and NYUNY is notified when security clearance is denied?
2. Is it common practice to appeal these particular applications without informing the faculty member applicant?
3. The Committee is concerned about the issue of “workarounds.” What are they and how often are they employed to procure visas or security clearance?
4. Is there an existing information protocol between NYUAD and NYUNY? In the cases of Bazzi and Keshavarzian, there did not seem to be an exact procedure for when information would be provided, and to whom. Ron Robin and Hilary Ballon used to be important, visible figures in these processes. Who holds this role now?
5. Is Human Resources in NYUAD collecting information on the religious backgrounds of applicants? If so, how is that data being used?

Bloom responded that these experiences with Bazzi and Keshavarzian have made the NYUAD administration conscious of the need for more consistent and transparent procedures. So far, they have immediately appealed any clearance denials. However, they have been inconsistent in informing applicants of the results. Currently, Human Resources submits applications for security clearance and is notified if they are rejected. Rejected applicants are resubmitted automatically. He thinks the process should change so that as soon as HR, the faculty member, and department know about the invitation to teach at NYUAD, the process will go through a designated administrator, who will keep everyone updated both at NYUAD and NYUNY. When applications are rejected, this person will inform the faculty member and ask him or her before resubmission, and follow up with the result.

Regarding workarounds, the attempt was to make the process as simple as possible. Going forward, these would not be used anymore. Human Resources has always kept information on applicants' religions to process and administer applications only, but Bloom does not think they have ever compiled data on how many applicants of which religions are admitted. Piano agreed with Bloom. He said that as an institution, NYUAD thrives on access to different faculty. He was also very disappointed when Bazzi and Keshavarzian were not able to come. One good thing about NYU is that there are always alternative places to teach, which is one way to move forward. They hope to make the application a tighter and more precise system though, with applicants being more involved from the beginning.

#### **Q & A with committee**

Borenstein asked two questions:

1. Bloom and Piano said that there are plenty of people in Abu Dhabi who are Shi'a, Iranian, or Lebanese. But, is it possible those people were admitted when the government was less stringent, and would have a harder time now that the government seems to be stricter?
2. The changes they mentioned making to the process sound positive. Is there a plan for a public rollout of these new procedures?

Bloom agreed that it would be a good idea to make these procedural changes public. However, he said they have seen no evidence of the government "cracking down"; 200 students, 500 staff, and all faculty renew visas every year or two, most without incident. He cannot say why those two cases were different.

Borenstein asked whether there was any information to suggest why Bazzi and Keshavarzian were declared security risks. Bloom said no and that NYUAD administration cannot do anything about visa rejections except argue individual cases.

A committee member asked Bloom and Piano two questions.

1. In his remarks, Bloom mentioned that no one had analyzed the visa applications to see if there's a pattern of discrimination based on gender, religion, sex, etc. Could someone – a subcommittee of this committee, or a member of NYUAD administration or HR – have access to the data to perform such an analysis? That means they would need data on religion, sex, nationality, age, and year of application. Bloom said he would support this request and would look into it.
2. Do they have data on the overall rate of rejections among faculty, students, etc.? Bloom confirmed that they have that data. The committee member also noted that Bazzi felt his clearance might have been denied due to his activity on social media or his research and publications on Middle Eastern governments. He therefore sees this as an issue of academic freedom. What can NYU do to remedy that scenario? Bloom said it is impossible to know and that despite enjoying academic freedom, there are restrictions on what faculty can say in public outside the classroom in certain areas. Those were the laws when NYUAD was established and we have to deal with them.

Piano added that this is about the nature of the global network. Their agreement has been to ensure NYUAD can operate with academic freedom while abiding by the law, but sometimes there is friction. They are able to do a great deal inside the context of an academic area, but social media remains an area of debate. For affiliated faculty in NYUAD, there are ways in which boundaries there are different than those in New York. However, this can be enhancing, rather than limiting, because students learn to understand these systems

better. In terms of operation, NYUAD administration will oppose any attempt by the UAE government to limit academic freedom.

Borenstein said the underlying problem of NYUAD for some faculty in New York is that NYU administration signed on to make these compromises with the UAE government, but the faculty did not. Another committee member asked whether there is any reason the UAE government should be persuaded by NYU advocating for people whose research they consider objectionable? Piano said he has been part of NYUAD planning from the beginning and was on the committee planning for curricular activities. When they talk about the impact NYU has had in the Emirates, (for example, with regard to the number of Rhodes Scholars), it is clear the country is on a trajectory of change. When there are difficulties, the administration can certainly have conversations about them with our partners. When faculty are denied entry to the UAE, it limits NYU's ability to be an asset of which Abu Dhabi can be proud. Bloom thinks that a climate of academic freedom is sanctioned and accepted among the 1,200 students and faculty. They have the highest percentage of Rhodes Scholars of any institution in the world (in proportion to enrollments) and are getting more and more of the best Emirati students to matriculate.

Another committee member asked Bloom to confirm that while the laws of Abu Dhabi can preclude certain people from entering based on their research, scholars can criticize Abu Dhabi on campus. Bloom confirmed that that is true. The government has said they consider academic freedom crucial to a great university. The committee member said that if true, this is both reassuring and remarkable. Borenstein pointed out that while NYUAD has liberal-arts college academic freedom to teach as they see fit, there are local restrictions related to what can be considered the non-academic dissemination of research that engages with the public. The committee asked whether the University must be silent about this. Are there limits on official statements from NYU saying this is a violation of academic freedom? Bloom said that no one at NYUAD is limited on the research he or she can do. The issue is taking the results of that research to the public sphere and in violation of local laws using it as a direct attack on the UAE government, Islam, etc. The committee member told Bloom that this answer is unpersuasive. Bloom said that the University can certainly protest against limits on mobility. The committee member emphasized that he was not advocating "exploding" the issue, but wanted to ascertain whether NYU is limited in how vocal it can be before threatening the program. Piano added that this is also a question of how to make their protest known and also phrasing issues in light of their impact on efforts to build a top research institution.

A committee member followed up on Borenstein's comment, pointing out that NYU administrators gave faculty the impression that academic freedom questions had been settled prior to the deal being made. The University used positive rhetoric at the time, even though then-legal counsel Cheryl Mills, when pressed, was quite honest about how limited any legal guarantees of academic freedom were. Predictably, this has caused problems. Another committee member said there are a lot of academics at other universities who do research on the Gulf region and publish without trouble. Maybe NYU faculty could reach out to some of them to learn how they navigate these tensions and remain productive. Another committee member said he goes back and forth to NYUAD and feels that if we are to have this conversation, we should include discussion of the US's own restrictions on visas and certain research (i.e. on gun control). Another member pointed out that it is different because we can and do openly protest in the US and cannot in Abu Dhabi. A committee member noted that part of our frustration is the asymmetry of NYU dealing with a government. Is it a bad idea to withhold classes or refuse admissions to UAE students to express our displeasure? It's our only bargaining chip. Bloom answered that by withholding classes and/or admission, NYU is less effective as a global network. A committee member added that it would be wrong to answer a non-violation with a violation of our own educational policies and philosophies.

Piano acknowledged the difficulty of having this broad conversation within a small committee, and thanked members for their work. He is a strong believer in the global network and notes that faculty do work in areas tagged as criticism of the UAE government. Also, another faculty member recently published research that showed that a change in visa laws has negatively impacted the UAE economy. They developed a center at NYUAD to work on these issues, which is inevitably going to publish uncomfortable things. He thinks NYUAD is taking advantage of its position in the best possible way. Borenstein thanked Piano and Bloom for reaffirming their commitment to transparency. They left the meeting at 9:30.

### Discussion of draft statement

Borenstein suggested that the committee move on to improving its statement about the Bazzi and Keshavarzian visa denials. They would like feedback from the committee before releasing the statement. Klimke added that this conversation with Piano and Bloom reaffirms the need to raise this discussion within the wider NYU community, perhaps in a larger town hall next semester. This statement is not designed to end the debate, but to open it.

The committee thanked Borenstein and Klimke for their work on the draft, which was generally well-written. A committee member pointed out that there is disagreement over whether security clearance was denied over the applicants' religion or their research. In conversations he has had, it seemed to have more to do with social media. Borenstein answered that the relevant text was meant to acknowledge that being unable to travel to NYUAD is a limitation on faculty, but is different from faculty being limited on what they can say once at the portal. They will work on clarifying that language. Another committee member asked whether limited global mobility still constitutes a violation of academic freedom, if faculty can publish what they please? Another member answered that there is a distinction to be made; the issue here is not that the UAE government is preventing faculty from visiting, but that this represents a limit on freedom *within* our university. If faculty do not respond, they are complicit in that restriction. While total silence on this issue from faculty would be inappropriate, explosive protest would also be inappropriate. They must balance the two.

Borenstein suggested they include a three-part definition of academic freedom:

1. Freedom to speak within the "liberal arts model" of a classroom
2. Freedom of mobility – being able to get to that classroom
3. Freedom in research – to post research and analysis publicly on social media, unimpeded

What was lacking in President Hamilton's statement is an admission that faculty and NYU administration are to some extent permitting these limitations.

A committee member noted that at the last meeting, there was a suggestion to appoint a dean of global studies, or a similar position. He would recommend strengthening that suggestion in the statement. There should be some procedure set up that dictates what is to be done in cases like these and who reaches out and talks to affected faculty. Another committee member noted that his impression was that the two professors felt humiliated. Another committee member agreed with this; he felt both Bazzi and Keshavarzian wanted an apology. The committee could request that someone in university administration apologize. Borenstein agreed that the committee taking on the apology function would be inappropriate, and would let administrators off the hook. The committee should also remember that faculty need to be able to *remain* on location, which is jeopardized by the renewal process occurring every three years. What is the meaning of tenure if clearance can be denied?

Another member noted that the committee also discussed how the University uses alternative routes ("workarounds") that could be illegal, i.e. sending faculty as consultants. The committee's statement should make clear that this is unacceptable. A committee member described how the Ministry of the Interior in the UAE oversees security clearance; there are different office branches for Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and they might come to different conclusions regarding the same case. The UAE government is not a monolith and should not be viewed that way. Another committee member wanted the possibility of religious discrimination to be made clearer. Another member agreed, saying omitting mention of that element feels like complicity.

Borenstein said he and Klimke will rewrite the statement to incorporate the committee's suggestions, as well as any others members send them. They will send the draft back to the group and give them a window for final approval. A committee member requested that the co-chairs not put members' names on it without receiving affirmative consent from each. Borenstein agreed and said that if they don't hear from certain members, only people who have answered will be signed on.

A committee member suggested they look at the demographics of students admitted and people at NYUAD granted visas before making a conclusion about religious bias, as Bloom and Piano agreed to this analysis.

Another committee member suggested the committee use this document to define its own role in this discussion going forward.

The meeting ended at 10 am.