

**“Advocacy for academic freedom and human rights:
internationalization in a fragmented world“**

Utrecht University | Ruhr University Bochum

Utrecht Network | Scholars at Risk | Cost Action ‘Democratization at stake’ - No.23149

Summer School Schedule

13-14 August 2026 (online/self-guided) and 17-21 August 2026 (in situ)

Location: St Janskerkhof 3 ([google maps](#)), rooms 021-022

17 July 2026

Thursday, 13 August 2026

10:00-11:00: Introduction to the Summer School and Self-Guided Learning ([Bart van de Laar](#), Utrecht University | [Iris Vernekohl](#), Ruhr University Bochum)

Teams link to follow.

Thursday, 13 August & Friday, 14 August 2025

Prior self-guided online learning

Participants of the summer school are expected to engage in self-guided online learning via the following means:

1) Readings

Critically read the obligatory introductory literature provided in the reading lists per day in Teams Classes (you are invited via a separate personal access email).

2) MOOC “Dangerous questions: why academic freedom matters”

Please take the 90-minutes self-paced MOOC on academic freedom developed by Amnesty International and the Scholars at Risk Network. You can access the MOOC and get a certificate of participation here:

<https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/courses/437/dangerous-questions-why-academic-freedom-matters>

3) Podcasts “Fragile freedom” and “Free to think”

In addition to the MOOC, please listen to the listed episodes of the following podcasts

- **STOAS Podcast „Academic freedom in the EU – defending a pillar of democracy:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKFAAGkVjoE>
- **Free to Think Podcast** (Episodes No. 40, 39, 37, 34, 28, 23, 20) <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/podcast/>
- **Fragile Freedom Podcast** (Episode 1/Belarus): <https://fragile-freedom.podigee.io/>

Monday, 17 August

Concepts and status quo of academic freedom and human rights in global perspective

- 09:00-09:45: **Welcome, introduction and getting to know each other:** (Bart van de Laar, Utrecht University | Iris Vernekohl, Ruhr University Bochum).
- 09:45-11:45: **Lecture & group work: Academic freedom as a fundamental academic value: meaning, scope, frames of reference** (Prof. Liviu Matei, King's College London, Global Observatory on Academic Freedom, and Magna Charta Observatory).
- 12.00-13:00: **Lecture: Beyond regulation: an institutional perspective on protection of academic freedom and institutional autonomy (in the European Union)** (Jurgen Rienks, Neth-ER, and Utrecht University).
- 13:00-14:00: *Lunch break*
- 14:00-15:30: **Guided group work: Status quo of and threats to academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and democracy around the world** (Prof. Adam Braver | Roger Williams University & Scholars at Risk Network | Iris Vernekohl, Ruhr University Bochum, Utrecht Network & SAR Germany | **Speaker tbc**, Cost Action 'Democratization at stake').

Following an introduction to the Academic Freedom Index and an exploration of global trends in academic freedom, participants will work in small groups to examine the growing challenges facing higher education across different national and regional contexts. Building on the evidence presented, groups will discuss how declining academic freedom is connected to democratic backsliding, authoritarian governance, and illiberal political developments, and explore the implications of these trends for institutional autonomy.

The discussions will focus on identifying current and emerging threats, reflecting on their consequences at multiple levels: for individual students and scholars, disciplines, for universities and research institutions, and for higher education systems nationally and globally. Participants are encouraged to draw on their own experiences to identify patterns, context-specific challenges, and the broader societal implications of restrictions on academic freedom.

The session concludes with a plenary exchange of key, highlighting shared concerns and questions that will inform the subsequent workshop sessions.

- 15:45-17:00: **Fireside chat: Being "at-risk": Personal experiences from higher education institutions and scholars at risk** (**Moderator:** Prof. Adam Braver, Roger Williams University and Scholars at Risk Network, **Speakers:** Dr Alejandro Jasinski, Eberle Programme Fellowship University of Konstanz | Prof. Dr. Liviu Matei, King's College London | Dr. Stella Nyanzi, Philipp Schwartz Fellow at Ruhr University Bochum).
- 18:30-21:00: **Tapas dinner**
Champañeria Los Amigos, Voorstraat 56, Utrecht ([google maps](#)).

Tuesday, 18 August 2025

Protecting academic freedom: institutional, national and global advocacy initiatives

09:00-09:30: **Reflection on first day**

09.30-10:45: **Lecture: Academic freedom as a human right and related enforcement mechanisms** (Prof. Dr Katherine Fortin, Utrecht University).

11:00-13:00: **Lecture & Guided Group Work: Implementing the right to academic freedom: what role for universities and the university community?** (Bart van de Laar, Utrecht University | Iris Vernekohl, Ruhr University Bochum).

13:00-14:00: *Lunch break*

14:00-15:30: **Guided Group Work: National and global level support of academic freedom and scholars at risk** (Prof. Adam Braver, Scholars at Risk Networks & Rogers Williams University | Jakob Eppele, Ruhr University Bochum).

Based on group work, participants get acquainted with global and European ecosystems of initiatives in support of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and human rights. The initiatives to be presented and discussed by different groups are:

- *Scholars at Risk Network (global, Europe, national)*
- *Magna Charta Universitatum/Observatory (global)*
- *Global Observatory on Academic Freedom (global)*
- *Cost Action 'Democratization at stake' (Europe)*

15:45-17:15: **Fish bowl discussion: Protecting students, scholars and the freedom to think: reflections from different contexts** (Moderated by Iris Vernekohl. Speakers: Prof. Marco Borracetti, Scholars at Risk Italy Section | Prof. Adam Braver, Scholars at Risk Networks | Katariina Järve, European Student Union | Prof. Liviu Matei, King's College London | **Speaker tbc**, Cost Action 'Democratization at stake' .

What does it take to protect the freedom to ask difficult questions, pursue knowledge, and share ideas in an increasingly complex and polarized world? Across many countries, students and scholars are encountering new pressures—from political interference and attacks on academic expertise to restrictions on research, teaching, and public engagement. At the same time, universities and networks are finding ways to support and protect open dialogues.

*This fishbowl discussion brings together representatives with different perspectives. Rather than focusing on a single region or issue, the discussion will draw on diverse experiences **to explore how international collaboration can help protect students, scholars, and the freedom to question and exchange ideas.***

The conversation invites panelists and audience alike to reflect on how to build resilient academic communities and practical steps for institutions, researchers, and civil society together to defend academic freedom.

Questions:

1. *What challenges to academic freedom are you seeing in your own work? What surprised you most in recent years?*
2. *What can international collaborations do that individual institutions cannot?*
3. *How can universities better support students and scholars facing pressure while remaining spaces for open dialogue and critical inquiry?*
4. *What lessons can we learn from different national and institutional contexts about protecting academic freedom?*
5. *Looking ahead, what gives you hope? Where do you see synergy between initiatives and opportunities for collective action?*

A fishbowl discussion is an interactive conversation format that encourages dialogue between panelists and the audience. A small group of speakers begins the discussion in the "inner circle," while participants listen from the "outer circle." One seat is left open, allowing audience members to join the conversation by taking the open chair, contributing their perspective or asking a question before returning to the audience. This dynamic format creates space for diverse voices, shared reflection, and active participation, moving beyond traditional panel discussions to foster collective learning, exchange, and collaborative exploration of complex issues.

Wednesday, 19 August 2025

Introduction to human rights and public policy advocacy for academic freedom and scholars at risk

09:00-09:30: **Reflection on second day**

09:30-10:30: **Personal reflections on advocacy for/of a scholar at risk** (Dr. Stella Nyanzi, Ruhr University Bochum)

10:45-12:00: **Interactive lecture: Towards a ‘theory of change’: How to develop effective and convincing advocacy strategies/campaigns?** (Katariina Järve, European Student Union | Iris Vernekohl, Ruhr University Bochum & SAR Germany & Utrecht Network)

12:00-13:00: **Introduction to advocacy cases and group building:** (Bart van de Laar, Utrecht University | Prof. Adam Braver, Scholars at Risk at Risk | **Speaker tbc**, Cost Action ‘Democratization at stake’ .

13:00-14:00: *Lunch break*

14:00-17:00: **Guided group work/Case work: Advocacy for academic freedom – Part #1, Case-specific academic freedom and advocacy campaigns** (Bart van de Laar, Utrecht University | Prof. Adam Braver, Scholars at Risk Network & Roger Williams University| Jakop Eppele, Ruhr University Bochum).

18:00-20:00: **Pizza picknick in the park**

Park Lepelenburg ([google maps](#)) - if weather permits

Thursday, 20 August 2025

Developing advocacy campaigns for academic freedom and at-risk scholars

09:00-09:30: Reflection on third day

09:30-13:00: Group work/Case work: Advocacy for academic freedom and human rights
Part #2, Developing a *theory of change* of a case-related advocacy campaign

13:00-14:00: *Lunch break*

14:00-17:00: Group work/Case work: Advocacy for academic freedom and human rights
Part III: Designing an advocacy campaign

Friday, 21 August 2025

Presenting and reflecting on advocacy projects

09:00-09:30: Reflection on fourth day

09:30-13:00: Group work/Case work: Advocacy for academic freedom and human rights
Part IV: Preparing a convincing presentation (*in powerpoint*) of the developed advocacy strategy/campaign

13:00-14:00: *Lunch break*

14:00-16:00: Presentation and discussion of group work: group presentations of advocacy campaigns and panel, including members from Utrecht Network, Scholars at Risk Network and Cost Action 'Democratization at stake'

16:00-16:30: Summer school certificats

16:30-17:00: Networking & farewell
