2022–2023

Student Advocacy Seminars

END OF YEAR REPORT
About the Seminars

Scholars at Risk’s Student Advocacy Seminars provide university and college students with the opportunity to develop human rights research and advocacy skills through direct engagement on behalf of threatened members of the global higher education community, in partnership with Scholars at Risk.

The 2022-2023 Student Advocacy Seminars

- University of Dundee, Scotland
- University of California, Santa Barbara, USA
- Roger Williams University, USA (fall and spring)
- University of Nottingham, UK
- Endicott College, USA
- University of British Columbia, Canada (fall and spring)
- Ruhr University Bochum, Germany
- University of Iowa, USA
- University of Oslo, Norway
- University of Padova, Italy
- Muhlenberg College, USA
- University of Dayton, USA
- Bard College Berlin, Germany / Open Society University Network
- Metropolitan State University of Denver, USA
- University of Trento, Italy
- University of Connecticut, USA
- Carleton University, Canada
- University of Nebraska Omaha, USA
- Fairfield University, USA
- Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania: Mansfield, USA
- Monash University, Australia
A Learning Experience That Makes a Difference

Scholars at Risk Student Advocacy Seminars blend hands-on, real-world experience with classroom learning. Not only do students learn about academic freedom, international human rights standards, and transferable advocacy skills, they also become active advocates on behalf of wrongfully detained scholars.

Working in conjunction with Scholars at Risk’s advocacy team, seminar participants research country conditions and monitor cases. Students work and learn alongside an international NGO through implementing advocacy strategies specific to the most urgent needs of wrongfully detained scholars.

Over the past year, seminars persistently raised the names of detained scholars in the public sphere through meetings with government officials, organizing social media campaigns, running targeted petition drives, developing visual campaigns, and holding public events. Each advocacy effort supported SAR in urging global action in support of these scholars, and in furthering its work, drawing on the plans, the assessments, and the recommendations from each seminar.

“By engaging in advocacy, we gained valuable skills that will translate into our lives. We became more engaged citizens, learning how to be informed on globally important topics and then take action on those issues.” - Student in Muhlenberg College seminar
A Global Collaboration

2022-23 saw over 500 students from 21 unique seminars in North America, Europe, and Australia, working on nine cases from China to Central Europe to the Middle East. Throughout the year, students discovered the value of collaboration—sharing ideas, resources, and advocacy plans—as well as attending virtual presentations with invited guests and speakers.

Using the Discord communication platform, students had the ability to reach out to one another and initiate dialogue. For example, a post from the seminar at University of California, Santa Barbara about making contact with then-detained Egyptian scholar Patrick Zaki led to a collective virtual advocacy strategy brainstorm between Zaki and students from across North America and Europe. Students further amplified each other’s public advocacy efforts by supporting and following other seminars on social media.

Collaborating with participants in other seminars, students learned and discovered the power of building coalitions across borders, engaging with other perspectives, and understanding the different geopolitical relationships and approaches to advocacy.
Scholars in Prison

SAR’s Scholars in Prison Project drives advocacy efforts on behalf of these scholars and students.

Its goals are to garner public support within and outside the higher education community; to urge state authorities to uphold legal obligations related to humane treatment and due process; to send a message to those imprisoned that they are not forgotten, but, rather, have the backing of an international community of colleagues and friends; and ultimately to secure their release.

SAR’s 2022-23 Student Advocacy Seminars advocated on behalf of these imprisoned scholars.

Abdul Jalil Al-Singace  
BAHRAIN, Mechanical Engineering

Marfa Rabkova  
BELARUS, Law

Ilham Tohti  
CHINA, Economics

Rahile Dawut  
CHINA, Uyghur Studies
SCHOLARS IN PRISON (CONT.)

Patrick George Zaki  
EGYPT, Women & Gender Studies

Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba  
INDIA, English Literature

Ahmadreza Djalali  
IRAN, Disaster Medicine

Niloufar Bayani  
IRAN, Biology

Nasser bin Ghaith  
UAE, Economics
**University of Dundee**

*Edzia Carvalho, Politics and International Relations*

**Scholars:** Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran)

Raised awareness through on-campus and social media campaigns, utilizing visual advocacy in order to inspire action.

**University of California, Santa Barbara**

*Claudio Fogu, Italian Studies*

**Scholar:** Patrick George Zaki (Egypt)

Students produced an infographic card, and a video appeal for Zaki’s release featuring a dance and a spoken word piece, which they distributed via social media. Students and faculty also participated in an episode of SAR’s Free to Think podcast.

**Roger Williams University**

*Brian Hendrickson, Writing Studies (fall term)*

*Robert Cole, Communication Studies (spring term)*

**Scholars:** Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran); Marfa Rabkova (Belarus): Patrick George Zaki (Egypt)

In association with seminar students at the University of Connecticut, authored and co-signed a letter to Representative David Cicilline (D-RI) appealing for support from Washington to aid in Dr. Djalali’s release.
University of Nottingham

Zinat Jimada, Human Rights Law Centre

Scholars: Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran)

Created an online informational site about the cases, giving background, why they matter, and a petition to the foreign secretary, James Cleverly, calling on him to take action on behalf of the detained Iranian scholars.

Endicott College

Michael Kilburn & Semahagn Abebe, Politics and International Studies

Scholars: Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran); Marfa Rabkova (Belarus); Patrick George Zaki (Egypt)

Hosted a campus-wide Human Rights Day to raise awareness about the imprisoned scholars, academic freedom, and to offer tools for taking action. Tables included infographics and brochures, opportunities for students to sign a letter requesting the unconstitutional release of the detained scholar, and letters of encouragement to be sent to the imprisoned scholars.

University of British Columbia

Jenny Peterson & Lisa Sundstrom, Political Science

Scholars: Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza (Iran); Marfa Rabkova (Belarus); Patrick George Zaki (Egypt); Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba (India); Ilham Tohti (China)

With UBC’s Walter C. Koerner Library, the seminar collaborated on a Scholars at Risk book display that showcased a selection of works by and about imprisoned scholars and students around the world, as well as providing information on the university’s student advocacy program and how to become involved in it.
SEMINAR HIGHLIGHTS (CONT.)

Ruhr University, Bochum  
Iris Vernekohl, International Office

**Scholar:** Marfa Rabkova (Belarus)

In coordination with a nation-wide Diversity Day, students organized a booth to inform the community about wrongfully imprisoned students in Belarus, and encouraged participants to design and write solidarity cards.

University of Iowa  
Amy Weismann, Center for Human Rights

**Scholars:** Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran); Marfa Rabkova (Belarus); Patrick George Zaki (Egypt)

Collaborated with international seminars on joint campaigns, and represented the work in Washington, DC at the 2023 Student Advocacy Days, taking meetings with the Iowa delegation.

University of Oslo  
Peris Sean Jones, Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law

**Scholars:** Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran); Marfa Rabkova (Belarus); Patrick George Zaki (Egypt)

As part of the ‘Students Democracy Day,’ curated an art exhibition of photos taken by Vadim Zamirovsky that documented the 2020 protests on the streets of Minsk. Additionally, information sheets about Marfa were provided, as well as a QR code leading to a sign-on letter to the Belarusian Embassy.
University of Padova

Francesca Helm & Claudia Padovani, Political Science, Law and International Studies

Scholar: Marfa Rabkova (Belarus)

In collaboration with SAR Italy, hosted “Student Advocacy Day 2023: Belarus at Risk,” with sessions ranging from alliance-building to the status of academic freedom in Europe, including a students’ call to the University of Padova in support of academic freedom in Belarus.

Muhlenberg College

Brian Mello, Political Science; Center for Ethics

Scholars: Patrick George Zaki (Egypt); Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran)

In a joint event with UC Santa Barbara, hosted a “Zaki Square,” with a tabling event providing information on Patrick Zaki and opportunities for direct advocacy via QR codes that linked directly to a petition demanding his release.

University of Dayton

Tracey Jaffe, International Studies

Scholars: Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran)

Shared research and advocacy summaries publicly at the Roesch Symposium Social Science Presentation, which included two local residents from Iran who offered feedback and shared their own experiences.
**Bard College Berlin/OSUN Network**

*Kerry Bystrom, English; Human Rights*

**Scholars:** Ilham Tohti, Dr. Rahile Dawut (China)

With co-director Ben Mauk in attendance, screened the award-winning film “Reeducated” about the Uyghur experience inside a prison in Xinjiang. The event helped to publicize petitions to European and German politicians.

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**University of Trento**

*Ester Gallo, Department of Sociology*

**Scholars:** Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran)

Organized two-day event, “Academic Freedom: Voices from Iran,” focused around three areas: Niloufar Bayani, academic freedom in Iran and gender. The conference involved Iranian scholars in Trento, allowing them to share their experiences with academic freedom in Iran.

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**University of Connecticut**

*Sandra Sirota, Human Rights Institute*

**Scholars:** Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran)

Presented on their advocacy efforts to the University of Connecticut Gladstein Family Human Rights Institute’s 20th Anniversary Conference, followed by a tabling event that encouraged signing a petition calling for the releases of Ahmadreza Djalali and Niloufar Bayani.
Carleton University

Melanie Adrian, Law and Legal Studies

**Scholars: Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran); Marfa Rabkova (Belarus); Patrick George Zaki (Egypt); Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba (India); Ilham Tohti (China)**

Held a one-day event on academic freedom and human rights called, “Jailed for Thinking: The Importance of Academic Freedom for Liberty and Democracy,” which was supported by a Member of Parliament.

Fairfield University

Julie Mughal, Center for Social Impact

**Scholars: Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran)**

Held an afternoon training session hosted by SAR Student Advocacy Coordinator Adam Braver, and former SAR Scholar Alfred Babo.

Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania: Mansfield

Johnathan Rothermal, History, Philosophy, & Political Science

**Scholars: Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran)**

Organized a week of action that included an Iran-themed trivia night, campus advocacy, and a powerful talk by Xiyue Wang, former Iranian-held political prisoner, on his ordeal in Evin prison and the value of transnational advocacy.
Monash University

Kate Murphy, Contemporary History

Suzy Killmister, Philosophy

Scholars: Niloufar Bayani, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran); Marfa Rabkova (Belarus); Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace (Bahrain); Patrick George Zaki (Egypt)

Established Australia's inaugural Student Advocacy Seminar, with a record 190 students working in teams on five different cases.
Student Advocacy Days

Student Advocacy Days is an annual event that brings students and faculty participating in Student Advocacy Seminars to Washington, DC for a day of training hosted by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), followed by a day of action on Capitol Hill. This year, over 40 students from the United States and Canada joined SAR for the event. While in DC, students from different universities linked up to increase their impact in meetings on the Hill. They shared tips and feedback with each other (while gathered in a Senate cafeteria!) between meetings, and they conducted a joint social media campaign to help broadcast their efforts.

The students held 19 meetings with representatives of Members of Congress to discuss concern for scholars and students who have been wrongfully detained: Belarusian students, Ahmadreza Djalali and Niloufar Bayani (Iran), Patrick Zaki and Ahmed Samir Santawy (Egypt), Ilham Tohti (China), and Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba (India). In the weeks following these meetings, students exchanged flurries of emails highlighting ways in which Congressional representatives can support wrongfully imprisoned scholars, including through the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's Defending Freedoms Project.

In his inspiring keynote address, formerly imprisoned South Sudanese scholar Peter Biar Ajak underlined the importance of protecting scholars and the university community:

“History shows us that change is inevitable. Scholars play an important role in this – a society that cannot question itself is a society that isn’t going anywhere.”

- Peter Biar Ajak
We are grateful to everyone who made this event a success, including: the student and faculty participants from Carleton University, Canada; Mansfield University, USA; Roger Williams University, USA; University of British Columbia, Canada; University of California at Santa Barbara, USA; University of Dayton, USA; University of Iowa, USA; the scholar-activists who offered advice; and our NGO and association partners from the American Psychological Association; Hostage Aid Worldwide; The Freedom Initiative; The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s Committee on Human Rights; SAR-United States; and our gracious hosts at AAAS.
Get Involved

Start a Student Advocacy Seminar on your campus today.

Student Advocacy Seminars are available to all SAR member institutions. To learn more, contact SAR’s Student Advocacy Seminar Coordinator Adam Braver at adam.braver@nyu.edu.

Support

Individuals are invited to support SAR’s student advocacy efforts and our related activities for at-risk scholars. SAR depends on the generous financial support of friends inside and outside higher education communities to sustain our work. Gifts of any size are gratefully appreciated, including matching gifts and bequests. To give, visit https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/give-today/.