Faculty Senate Extra Session on IDDPs
March 10, 2021
TJ Hinrichs

Outline of some of the difficult situations being faced on a daily basis by academics operating in the US and the PRC, for consideration of ethical, risk, and academic freedom implications. I take maximizing academic exchange as a given goal. The situations outlined below do not confront the larger concerns around IDDP collaborations with PRC entities related to human rights.

Major Resources:


I. Operations, Research, and Teaching in the PRC

- **General safety in field** (faculty, grad, undergrad)
  - Getting picked up by security services (us, our students, our PRC colleagues (most at risk)
    - Getting taken/kidnapped off the street, out of libraries
    - homes ransacked and families grilled
  - **Denied access to field sites, archives**
  - **Data theft**
  - **Censorship in publishing, on platforms:**
    https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/12/18/zoom-helped-china-surveillance/
    - Do we agree to publish articles or books in PRC journals that have contents censored?
    - Is it OK if they do not censor our particular article, but do censor others?
    - Do we allow censored journals to retain our names on their editorial boards? (American scholars have said no)
  - **Student study and research in the PRC**
    - Do we explain likely risks, and leave decisions to students? — I have seen this framed in peer American institution colleagues’ scenarios as a question of whether
to “forbid” students from doing certain research, e.g., that entails interviewing feminists
  o Do we leave students to figure it out for themselves? (no.)
  o Do we steer students away from sensitive topics, like migrant labor and feminism?
  o Do we advise students to self-censor when in China and on Zoom?

**In those contexts: what does Academic Freedom mean?**

**II. Teaching and advising in the U.S.:**

**In person teaching** — already some concerns —
  o reports of PRC students (in the PRC and the U.S.) taking or auditing classes for the purpose of reporting on fellow students (and in the PRC at least faculty) to Security arms
    ▪ I have heard of this in recent years from PRC graduate students angered by the charge, and from colleagues at other U.S. universities.
  o PRC students rallying against and in cases successfully disrupting events, e.g., in 2019 on Uighur genocide (or in 2008 on Tibet) https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/3091643/how-strained-us-china-relations-are-playing-out https://www.voanews.com/usa/china-sensitive-topics-us-universities-draw-more-online-harassment
    ▪ Do you cancel such events (no, but has happened)
    ▪ How do you handle such situations?

**Risks greater Zoom teaching & student vulnerabilities** — subjects (e.g., Uighurs, Falungong, #MeToo) sensitive to PRC students — what do you do when “Instruction Under Surveillance”: https://www.chronicle.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/article/instruction-under-surveillance
  o some of them are curious and meander into topics that might endanger them and their families,
  o when some of them become visibly distraught, frightened, or angry when such topics arise, but remain silent? Can you even safely broach such topics with a student by Zoom? (iPhone resort)
  o when some of them vehemently reject reports, e.g., of genocide, as hyperbolic — How do you go about turning it into a learning opportunity?

**What does academic freedom mean?**
  o Do you barge ahead and teach Uighur genocide to students Zooming in from the PRC, come what may? Do you sneak it into your curriculum and spring it on them by surprise? Do you make it visible on your syllabus as a kind of warning?
  o Do you tell students not to take your class in order to protect their own safety (Princeton) https://www.dailyprincetonian.com/article/2021/01/princeton-china-digital-national-security-law-american-universities
○ Do you adjust content out of concern for student safety? What might/should those adjustments look like?