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### Scholars At Risk: Summer 2022 Internship

To preface this essay, let me introduce the organization with which I interned this summer, starting in June of 2022 and ending in September. Scholars At Risk is a Not For Profit organization founded by Robert Quin at the University of Chicago. The organization, in the words chosen by its team for their website, is “an international network of institutions and individuals whose mission it is to protect scholars and promote academic freedom.” Scholars At Risk works with scholars who are facing threats within their home countries or institutions, a social or political silencing they cannot escape. Scholars At Risk, then steps in, helping create opportunities at universities all over so scholars can continue their work in an environment that is safe. This also ensures that the scholars' theories and works are not “lost”, as the team mentions on their website, or forgotten.

Scholars At Risk is a relatively new organization compared to others in its field like the ACLU or Amnesty International, being founded in June of 2000 following an international conference. However, its database has grown to include a large number of universities and schools. There are 649 universities in an ever growing directory, that host scholars or provide other opportunities for professors, researchers and others at risk. Before I segway into my work, it is important to understand how Scholars At Risk functions, in regards to the different teams that work in tandem in order to make its vision come true and to explain my own role as an intern within the organization. Most importantly, however, I will go into detail about the process

for persecuted scholars to apply to the organization for its help. One of its member organizations is our very own Bard College. Bard as well as the OSUN network factors into my journey as an intern at Scholars At Risk which I will talk more about further into my paper.

There are four main teams that make up the organization, the Advocacy Team, the Protection Team, the Membership Team, and the Communications Team. Scholars At Risks Advocacy Team, work with the Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, which as quoted on Scholars At Risks website, “focuses on developing a greater understanding of the volume and nature of attacks on higher education communities in order to develop more effective protection responses.” The advocacy team works with a group of higher-education professionals and human rights advocates and workers to write incident reports about “incidents of attacks on higher education systems, institutions or personnel” which researchers collect the details of. They work to organize Legal Clinics with partner organizations, as well as Student Advocacy Seminars which serve the purpose of empowering students “to conduct research and advocate on behalf of imprisoned scholars and countries where attacks on higher education are prevalent.” An example of Scholars A Risks outreach could be seen in Bard College’s own classrooms, particularly Human Rights Advocacy, with Professor Thomas Keenan, a board member of Scholars At Risk.

Scholars At Risks Protection Team, works on one of the major focuses of Scholars At Risk, creating opportunities and helping persecuted scholars find jobs across the world where their freedom of expression is protected and they are able to preserve their work as well. The Membership Team focuses on building Scholar Risk’s member database. They do so by looking into Universities in countries or geographical regions that may not be adequately represented on Scholar At Risks member maps. They do so on the basis of new crises arising in various regions across the world, finding academic opportunities in countries closest to the region in crisis that

would allow for a safe haven of scholars in need and their ideas. The Communications Team works on inter organizational correspondence, as well providing the tactics to reach a wider audience, and make the organization more accessible to scholars in need as well as members or potential members.

Moreover, to understand the organization itself, more specifically how this organization views and deals with “hate” or the result of hatred, it is paramount that we understand how Scholar At Risks chooses which scholars to help. The criteria and process for helping these scholars is one that Scholars At Risk seems to have worked hard to distinguish. The organization helps individuals but more specifically people who have received their PhDs or are academic professionals in Higher Ed. Their goal is to evacuate and protect to the best of SARs abilities, those Higher Ed professionals and academics who are being persecuted for having certain belief systems, or for the work of the academic field of thought they specialize in. In their own words as is mentioned on the website, “Scholars at Risk protects scholars suffering grave threats to their lives, liberty and well-being by arranging temporary research and teaching positions at institutions in our network as well as by providing advisory and referral services.” This understanding of who Scholars At Risk is able to help plays a big role in understanding how the organization views hate.

As an intern for Scholars At Risk, working with multiple departments, I was responsible

## Global

SAR has developed a directory of fellowships, scholarships, and both academic and non-academic opportunities from institutions around the world. Access resources [here](#).

## Afghanistan

SAR has developed a directory of fellowships, scholarships, and both academic and non-academic opportunities for scholars, students, and others who are out of Afghanistan and for those who are still within the country. SAR will add additional resources to this list as they become known to us. Access resources [here](#).

## Ukraine

SAR has developed a directory of fellowships, scholarships, and both academic and non-academic opportunities for scholars, students, and others who are out of Ukraine and for those who are still within the country. Access resources [here](#).

for helping bridge the gap

between different departments in

regards to increasing

communication between them

about the work I was doing

within the organization. While the Protection Team would focus on the research I was doing, the Communications Team is where I would go if I needed more structural or design approval for the project since a lot of the work I was doing involved changes that would be made to the organization's website itself.

My work at Scholars At Risk evolved during my time there. As a Protection Team Intern, working under Sarah Willcox, the Executive Director at Scholars At Risk, which was the primary role for which I was hired to the organization, one of the major concerns that I was charged with tackling was the discrepancy between the availability of resources found for Afghanistan and Ukraine. When I first joined the team the first thing I noticed even before I saw the resources themselves, was that the resources for Afghanistan did not even seem as accessible on the website due to the immediacy and recent nature of the event. While the Ukraine resource page had a clear button directing users of the website to it on the main page, this was not initially the case for Afghanistan. I worked on creating an equal access in the physical sense first for the current Afghan and Ukraine resources mentioned here. Moreover, I also created a more clear distinction for the general global resources so that those who were coming to Scholars At Risks's website in search of resources for individuals from other countries also felt they were supported and represented. The photograph on the preceding page is a screenshot of the "Resources for Scholars and At-Risk Individuals" on the SAR website<sup>1</sup>. This is a page that I formatted to have clear indicators and links for resources in these three areas: Global, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.

One thing to note is that during this internship I had to learn how to work with WordPress, the software used to generate and update the Scholars At Risk Website. The reason why this is so significant is because Scholars At Risks website is how they disseminate information largely to those who are looking for resources or gain Scholars At Risks help. This

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/scholar-resources/>

then comes to how the organization views hate. The organization condemns all acts of hatred and violence against human beings, but as is evident from the criteria of who they choose to use their resources to help, Scholars At Risk works largely with those who are already established scholars and whose intellectual property or academic work is being threatened by their governments or other such socio-political factors. They acknowledge then that that means a large number of individuals, even within academia like PhD students or others, who may not have established themselves as recognized scholars within a certain field do not qualify for Scholars At Risks limited resources. This is when the website is of utmost importance. The pages and resources I worked on target largely resources for those individuals who do not qualify for Scholars At Risks help but are in fact in danger of persecution. It these budding scholars who can access the website in order to find out resources to help them evacuate dangerous situations as well as find placement in universities as well as fellowships all over the world catered to their academic pursuits. Scholars At Risk recognizes then that hate effects a very large variety of individuals and while their approach in regards to their categories for who they help is very limited, the organization does everything in its power to help those who do not qualify for their help find the resources they need to escape dangerous situations and exist away from their home countries.

In order to work on this issue of access thus on the disproportionate resources found not only for Afghan scholars but also students and others involved in academia from Afghanistan following the takeover of the Taliban, I worked on each individual resource page as well. This was a multipronged project and can be visualized in the picture below which is a screenshot of the “Resources for at-risk individuals from Afghanistan” page that I curated and edited via WordPress as well:

*Protecting scholars and the freedom to think, question, and share ideas*

## Resources for at-risk individuals from Afghanistan

Scholars at Risk remains very concerned about recent events in Afghanistan, and our global network is seeking to assist as many scholars and practitioners at risk as possible. SAR is unable to assist students or others who are not professors, research scholars, or advocates/ leaders at a recognized civil society organization. We hope the external resources listed below may be useful sources of information for students, and for those seeking pathways out of Afghanistan. SAR will add additional resources to this list as they become available. Kindly note that any general inaccuracies or outdated deadlines referenced within each of the listed resources are not SAR's responsibility.

[Fellowship Opportunities](#)  
[General Resources](#)  
[Resources for Students](#)  
[Visa and Transit Resources](#)  
[Digital Security Resources](#)

My first job was to compile an extensive list of resources for Afghan students and scholars across the world. This involved first identifying different geographical regions that currently were the most accessible to Afghan refugees, and the ones who seemed to be the most accommodating for students evacuating Afghanistan as well. I looked into resources in Pakistan as well as Turkey. My work entailed speaking with members of the Membership Team, specifically Maddie Everett<sup>2</sup>, that focused on recruiting different organizations and schools who were open to accepting scholars who were threatened and at risk into their academic programs as students and fellows, or were willing to open up positions for Professors or scholars escaping persecution. In speaking with the Membership team I was struck by how they worked to pinpoint geographic locations that would be the most helpful for such at-risk individuals in academia and then took the initiative to reach out to them. We spoke of the Agha Khan University, a leading medical school and University in Pakistan and the positive implication of Scholars At Risk developing a relationship with them. There is a drive that Scholars At Risk has to maximize their

<sup>2</sup><https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/people/madeline-everett/#:~:text=Maddie%20Everett%20is%20the%20Membership,in%20the%20U.S.%20and%20abroad.>

membership not only for those scholars they can help but almost especially for those they cannot, in order to provide resource lists for them. This speaks once again to their take on hate and its impact. Even if one does not have the resources to help every individual, there is an emphasis on finding resources that others have set up in order to help those you are unable to reach. After identifying as many possible research fellowship and scholar protection opportunities that I could, it was significant to characterize them according to geographic region.

Following this perhaps the most significant element of this project I undertook was ensuring there was accessibility within the website itself as I discussed earlier, but more specifically here accessibility to the specific resource pages for Afghan, Ukraine and Global resources as well. I achieved this by using hyperlinks in order to signal specific geographic regions of kinds of opportunities as is seen in the image on the previous page<sup>3</sup>. This allows for easy navigation of the website, especially when time is of the utmost importance when scholars who are being persecuted are researching for opportunities that would allow them to study or partake in their chosen field of academia freely and without fear of unimaginable consequences. This is a process I repeated for Ukraine<sup>4</sup> and the global<sup>5</sup> community as well, to make sure all resources present were up to date and ensure that there weren't any new resources that could be added to the section for at-risk Ukrainian scholars and scholars in general as well. The team I worked most closely with on the issue of accessibility was the Communications Team, as they were the ones who presented in a manner the public face of Scholars At Risk via the website and social media, particularly, Prachi Patel on the Communications Team whose job focused on “cultivating effective internal and external communications for SAR”<sup>6</sup> as is stated on the website.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources-for-at-risk-individuals-from-afghanistan/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources-for-at-risk-individuals-from-ukraine/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/2022/07/alternative-resources/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/people/prachi-patel/#:~:text=Posted%20October%207%2C%202021,SAR%20programming%20and%20media%20relations.>

What was particularly significant to me about Scholars At Risk's approach to hate is that all members of the organization seemed to agree on their philosophy for how to handle hate, particularly hate in academia. When working with Rose Anderson, "the Director for Protection Services at Scholars at Risk"<sup>7</sup> as mentioned on Scholars At Risks website, one of her main tasks was to manage the emails sent out to those who do not qualify for Scholars At Risks help. There was a certain insistence on perfecting the timing and content of such an email, curated specifically to ensure that it mentioned clearly additional resources that could help those individuals that would not be receiving direct help from Scholars At Risk. There was an instance on uniformity, focusing on ensuring that the resources Scholars At Risk provides these individuals they are forced to turn away are equitable. However, an incident that stayed with me in particular during my internship was when I was meeting with Sarah Willcox during our regular daily check ins, and we came across the email of a student who had emailed Scholars At Risk directly explaining in detail their situation and their need for immediate assistance and evacuation from the dangerous situation they were in in regards to being on the receiving end of persecution for their academic beliefs. The request for evacuation and resources was in an area that I had been researching heavily in an attempt to find more resources for those Scholars At Risk could not help in that region. Sarah immediately decided it would be helpful to send the formatted email, but to add the new resources I had been researching. This was technically in a manner against protocol since there is a formatted email sent to all individuals who reach out for help and do not qualify for Scholar At Risk help. However, the way we worked around this was to then ensure that all those resources were up on the website at the earliest possible time once they were vetted and the newly edited resources pages I had put up on the website were then included in the resources and the typical formatted email sent out to all individuals who reached

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/people/rose-anderson/>



out for help. This ensured that not only was the website accessible but Scholars At Risk was being equitable towards all those requesting help, even if they could not help them. Thus it became evident the duty this organization believes it has to disseminate as quickly and effectively as possible credible sources of aid for all those who contact them, regardless of their geographical location or their qualification for Scholars At Risks Resources or not.

This was seen most clearly in my conversation with Scholars At Risk founding Executive Director, Robert Quinn<sup>8</sup>. I asked him a question that had been on my mind and that frames in a manner all I have discussed in this essay in regards to how Scholars At Risk understands hatred. I asked him how it feels to have such a narrow category for those Scholars At Risk can help and more importantly if there are some elements in regards to academics that Scholars At Risk would condemn and would not protect scholars for. This question came to mind when thinking of PEN America<sup>9</sup> the organization I interned at the summer before this. They were an organization that believed in the protection of Freedom of Expression, especially artistic expression and were intent on defending all individuals regardless of beliefs if they were being persecuted for, say, their art. However, if an artist was clearly inciting violence with their works, against a certain community, for instance, and so perpetuating hatred, they did not, in a manner, provide that same protection or support for such an artist. Thus I wondered if there were such academics that Scholars At Risk, would refuse to protect, even if they were prisoners of conscience in a manner. Robert Quinn's answer was simple: there were enough clear cut cases of scholars who simply wanted to pursue their academic work, like Rahile Dawut<sup>10</sup>, disappeared Uyghur scholar from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China, that they had not in a manner considered or

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/people/robert-quinn/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://pen.org/give/?gclid=CjwKCAiA7vWcBhBUEiwAXieItt05k2NeWpjBGMN8eVyvsxQ1dbBLGe5NKvw057lnVLilu\\_L1o8-CfxoCCEUQAvD\\_BwE&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=paid&utm\\_campaign={CampaignName}](https://pen.org/give/?gclid=CjwKCAiA7vWcBhBUEiwAXieItt05k2NeWpjBGMN8eVyvsxQ1dbBLGe5NKvw057lnVLilu_L1o8-CfxoCCEUQAvD_BwE&utm_source=google&utm_medium=paid&utm_campaign={CampaignName})

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/rahile-dawut-china/#:~:text=Rahile%20Dawut%20is%20a%20professor,in%20Uyghur%20folklore%20and%20traditions.>

defined the parameters of who they would not help. When we discussed it then during our conversation it became clear that those who were actively inciting hatred through their academia may not then have a place within the protective realms of Scholars At Risk. I wonder if, like PEN America, it might be helpful for Scholars At Risk to define most clearly in a manner which cases would not qualify for their aid, not because they are students, or not recognized scholars but because they might have views that cause more harm than good.

One thing I really appreciate about Scholars At Risks approach and belief towards countering hatred is their insistence on having it be connected in a manner to the youth, understanding that they will eventually play a very significant role in countering hatred in the very near future. This is seen by their connection to Bard College through the course Human Rights Advocacy. I had the privilege of taking this class my freshman year, and it is how I was introduced to Scholars At Risk. We built a campaign around freeing Rahile Dawut, a wrongfully disappeared scholar and professor. This was the exposure I and any other students needed into the nuances of advocacy in the real world and this is the kind of engagement outreach I believe Scholars At Risk and other organizations like it should do more of as they help build and shape the next generation of human rights advocates.