



Global Observatory on Academic Freedom

Repository: Preliminary Methodology

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I. About Global Observatory on Academic Freedom

The Global Observatory on Academic Freedom, a project supported by the Open Society University Network (OSUN), aims to conduct rigorous, innovative and pertinent scientific research aspiring to respond to the urgent need of rethinking the concept of academic freedom, a concept whose crisis we are witnessing throughout the world. New times pose new challenges, theoretical as much as empiric and GOAF will seek to stimulate the debate, connect the interested stakeholders and reflect upon possible pathways vital to the preservation of academic freedom and democratic societies.

GOAF responds to the need of universities to effectively pursue their duty of producing, transmitting and disseminating knowledge as a public good. Universities do not control their national regulatory frameworks, and this determines the degree of their institutional freedom and the professional freedoms of their academics and students, or the limitations on their distractors. They can, however, challenge public authorities to create conditions for academic freedom, they can take action, within limits that differ from country to country, to document infringements of academic freedom, resist restrictive attempts by governments and regulators, and find ways to promote, assert and protect academic freedom. As a globally networked platform, GOAF furthers the efforts of defining, promoting and defending academic freedom, while escaping the challenges that come with a national positioning.

Promoting academic freedom as a cornerstone of higher education and of a democratic society, while addressing the need for better formulation of the concept of academic freedom on the individual and institutional level, GOAF engages in research and advocacy activities at a global level. Part of our efforts to further academic freedom and to enhance research efforts is the repository of sources on academic freedom. We are happy to see the repository being of use to many researchers throughout the globe and we stay at your disposal to receive any feedback on its structure and usefulness.

More information can be found at: <https://elkana.ceu.edu/global-observatory-academic-freedom>

II. Purpose

The central purpose of this repository is *to offer clear and coherent overview of academic literature engaging with the topic of academic freedom*. We aim to make an easy-to-use database for diverse audiences: scholars, students, policy makers, consultants, and anyone interested in the topic.

The repository aims to contribute to a scholarly dialogue on academic freedom in a variety of ways:

- *Providing an insight into the diversity of scholarly thought on academic freedom.*
The repository does not intend to support or encourage a specific definition or conceptualization of the term, but rather depicts the wide array of contributions to the clarification of what does academic freedom mean, and for whom.
- Allowing scholars to start their research in a more efficient way, without the need to conduct literature search in numerous online libraries. This can potentially *stimulate opportunities for more research in the field*.
- *Helping scholars identify gaps in research on academic freedom.*
- Raising *awareness on the topic* of academic freedom, thus strengthening support for the topic.
- More generally, *producing, transmitting and disseminating knowledge as a public good*.

III. Methodology

The repository will be a platform hosted on the GOAF website, though currently developed as an Excel sheet in order to provide easy mobility and transferability. The first step in the development of the repository is the methodological consideration and the document in front of you.

Prior to starting the research, we searched for existing repositories on academic freedom. To our knowledge, there is no existing literature collections in this topic area. Being first of its kind, our repository will help to address this gap.

A core design choice of GOAF repository is to rely on existing methodologies in systematic reviewing (Stratton, 2019). This implies an established a-priori research protocol, defined search methods, thus leading to a minimized bias in literature selection and reproducible research results.

As a part of the initial steps, we specify basic inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria are:

- clear reference to the topic of academic freedom in higher education, thus stated in the title and/or abstract
- clear relation to tertiary education
- written in English language
- no earlier than 1915¹
- fully published (excluding work in progress)

¹ We refer to 1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure as a starting point in the debates on academic freedom. The original 1915 declaration was the result of the numerous infringements of academic freedom in the United States. This collectively authored document was presented at the first meeting of American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which was also founded in the same year.

Data collection process

Data sources?

- Scopus, Web of Science, and OSUN institutional repositories.

Keywords?

<academic freedom>, <freedom to teach>, <freedom to learn>, <freedom to research>, <freedom to training>, <right to academic self-governance>, <freedom to publication>, <academic censorship>, <freedom to academic exchange>, <campus integrity>

Types of documents?

- Journal articles, books, book chapters, edited volumes, and PhD dissertations on academic freedom.

Timeframe?

- Initially, the repository will focus on the most recent publications – starting from 2022. While the repository progresses to be populated, we hope to go as back as to 1915.

Language of documents?

- For the time being, only English. It is our hope that in the future we will expand the repository to other world languages. At the moment, we will keep a separate excel file with the documents in other languages. The data collection will be performed on the basis of expert recommendations in the area of academic freedom from the Research Network on Academic Freedom.

Geographical focus?

- To capture as many relevant publications as possible, we aim not to be restricted geographically, thus allowing global focus.

Excel file structure?

Author / Editor 1	Author / Ed. 2	Author / Ed. 3	Title	Publication type	Date	Disciplinary/ Subject Field	Abstract	Regional Focus	Full Citation (Chicago Manual of Style)	Notes	Link
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1. Database search for relevant literature using the above-mentioned keywords, timeframe, and linguistic criteria. Our search will be performed using Boolean logic, which is based on combinations “AND” (narrows the search) and synonyms “OR” (broadens the search). Additionally, we will use * to broaden our search (thus excluding limitations of endings, such as singular or plural form). Example: Univers* for university or universities.

Example: TITLE-ABS-KEY ((“academic freedom*” OR “freedom to teach” OR “freedom to learn” OR “freedom to research” OR “freedom to training” OR “right to academic self-governance” OR “freedom to publication” OR “academic censorship” OR “freedom to academic exchange” OR “campus integrity”) AND (“higher education” OR “univers*” OR “tertiary education” OR “academia”)).

2. Removing duplicates.
3. Selecting studies based on the basic exclusion and inclusion criteria.
4. Performing initial data screening of selected literature, which includes analyzing its abstracts in the aim to apply all relevant exclusion criteria.
5. Critical appraisal of the selected search items, which implies careful examination of the literature, “to judge its trustworthiness, and its value and relevance” (Burls, 2009). This step can be also referred to as quality assessment.

Some basic questions to be asked in the process of critical appraisal:

- *Is it conducted with minimum bias?*
 - *Is it methodologically clear?*
 - *Is it published in a reputable academic outlet (which includes double peer-review)?*
 - *Are the main findings linked to empirical data?*
 - *Is there any conflict of interest?*
 - *Are there any potential ethical issues?*
6. Data extraction into excel spreadsheets.

IV. Limitations

Since the repository works with global data, this can also bring methodological limitations and challenges, of which we are fully aware:

The range of sources: the repository aims to offer a diverse collection of sources engaged with the concept of academic freedom. While we attempt to offer a comprehensive picture, we also acknowledge that the repository is not exhaustive. It is a work in progress and our goal is to constantly update its contents.

Global North centrism: Further, we are fully aware of the limitations of the sources when it comes to the inclusion of the authors from the Global South. Lack of access to peer reviewed publications and documents can cause the unequal representation of the concept, thus preventing it from the perspective of a certain group of scholars in a limited geographic/linguistic space. Since the majority of the publications are coming from Anglophone countries in the Global North, we aim to consult with the scholars from Global South who are working on the topic of academic freedom in order to include broader understanding of the concept.

Contextual knowledge: Contextual practices vary in different cultural settings; therefore, fully global inclusion of research academic freedom can be complicated to perform. This has also been noted in the literature before. According to Marginson (2014: 25) the main challenges to approaching academic freedom are caused by: (1) variations in state traditions and political cultures, (2) variations in traditions specific to higher education, and (3) variations in university-state and university-society relations.

Limitations in contextual knowledge can imply that in some research contexts the research on academic freedom might be performed in a different form, thus not accessible to us (for example, in autocratic context researchers might use different ways to record their findings, potentially by circulating their study among their peers and choosing not to publish because of the safety concerns). Also, the

concept itself might be interpreted differently across the globe, which refers to three main challenges outlined by Marginson (2014).

Linguistic limitations: Only English language documents are included for the time being.

Access issues: we acknowledge that not all the documents might be open to public access, and it may pose difficulties in some instances.

References

Burls, Amanda (2009). "What is critical appraisal?" Available at:

http://www.bandolier.org.uk/painres/download/whatis/What_is_critical_appraisal.pdf

Marginson, S. (2014). Academic freedom: A global comparative approach. *Frontiers of Education in China*, 9(1), 24-41.

Stratton, S. J. (2019). Literature reviews: methods and applications. *Prehospital and disaster medicine*, 34(4), 347-349.