

Statement in Response to Report the FBI is Urging Universities to Monitor Chinese Students and Scholars

Campus Free Speech

Global Free Expression

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According to [recent public reports](#), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other government officials have advised some U.S. universities to develop protocols for monitoring students and scholars from Chinese state-affiliated research institutions. This move seemingly stems from growing suspicion that the Chinese government is engaged in espionage of American higher education, with the aim of stealing data and intellectual property. However, this is an area where the government must tread carefully.

Some [recent incidents suggest concern](#) with the mounting global reach of Beijing's tech-enabled authoritarianism is valid; but calls to monitor individuals solely based on their country of origin violate norms of due process and should raise alarms in a democracy. If there are articulable concerns about specific individuals because of their activities and affiliations, those should be pursued without regard to the individual's country of origin. Disclosure requirements, information sharing, and export control enforcement all offer powerful means to protect against intellectual property theft and espionage without resorting to tactics that cast suspicion on potentially hundreds of thousands of students and scholars. Federal agencies need to clarify and specify their concerns, and ensure that their efforts do not trample on individual rights nor on the principle of free and open academic inquiry and exchange.

More than 340,000 Chinese students are [reportedly studying in the United States](#), as of last year. If not conducted with care, this move risks hampering the future recruitment of talented foreign students and scholars to American shores. This move could also significantly impede the training of new scientists, as well as damage ongoing projects. The pursuit of scientific knowledge should be advanced under conditions of intellectual freedom without political or ideological restrictions.

Further, to the extent that China or other governments are utilizing international students and faculty in the United States as a means to carry out spying or to furtively funnel information back to officials at home, such activities infringe upon the academic freedom of those scholars as well as the institutions that host them and must stop. Unless researchers possess a formal and disclosed government affiliation, they must

be permitted to pursue their work free from state interference or involvement. Failure to adhere to this principle violates the precepts of academic freedom and threatens global scholarly exchange.

China's government is notorious for its aggressive use of surveillance. Efforts by the United States to fend off the global arm of autocracy must not mimic the very tactics it professes to reject. As concern on these matters grows, we advise universities to zealously safeguard their independence—to maintain their commitment to academic freedom, to uphold the principle of due process, and to respect the privacy rights of students and faculty, no matter their national origins.

ACPA-College Student Educators International
American Association of University Professors
Asian American Unity Coalition
Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Pennsylvania
Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs Association
Association for the Study of Higher Education
Association of American Colleges and Universities
Association of University Presses
Chinese American Citizens Alliance
Chinese Biopharmaceutical Association
Chinese for Affirmative Action
Defending Rights & Dissent
Foundation for Individual Rights in Education
Heterodox Academy
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