

Bennish Principles
International Student Research - Africa
August 2002

The Bennish Principles take their name from Dr. Michael Bennish. He is a member of the Tufts Medical School Faculty and directs the Africa Centre in South Africa. The principles outlined below grew out of an email conversation Dr. Bennish and Jeanne Marie Penvenne (Assoc. Prof. of History at Tufts) had in August 2002.

Students who plan to undertake international research abroad in collaboration with foreign or U.S. scholars should have a full appreciation of the benefits and constraints from the perspectives of all parties to the engagement.

Important Benefits:

First, all scholars / researchers / students have to start somewhere. Everyone at some point in her/ his life is a beginner. The U.S. benefits if its citizenry has first hand experience with international issues. Those are good reasons to encourage faculty to support and collaborate with student research undertaken abroad.

Second, beginners should come to terms with the fact that idealism and caring, although laudatory, do not qualify them for research. Indeed beginners are typically very ill equipped to "help." The better strategy is to reflect seriously on one's experiences, learn as much as possible and bring that learning back to one's participation as a powerful global citizen. The most important thing anyone can bring to international research is a healthy respect for local people, local knowledge and local people's strategies to define and resolve the dilemmas they face. A good beginner, well prepared for an opportunity can learn a great deal and, through critical reflection on the opportunity, can develop a new appreciation for global differences.

& Equally Important Constraints:

First, no matter how skilled, idealistic and willing the student, real practical constraints shape international faculty / practitioner / student partnerships. The first is that beginning scholars, students, researchers, interns often make more work for their faculty / mentors than they alleviate in their relationship with the faculty / mentor's research project. Good supervision is essential in such partnerships, but is also very time consuming for the faculty / practitioner.

Second, faculty / practitioners / mentors get so many requests for affiliation, collaboration, mentorship from abroad that they could devote all their energies to foreign students, to the neglect of Africa students of the region.. This is not merely a question of numbers - there are far more students in the States and Europe than there are in Africa, and there are a limited number of places that they can work with appropriate supervision.

If we want to go beyond the reproduction of privilege we must make space first for African students and interns.

Appropriate Planning and Preparation

Students will take best advantage of the limited opportunities available for international research developing a base of appropriate coursework, internships, research and practical opportunities at Tufts and in the USA prior to developing a project for international research. Granted, undergraduate international research is, almost by definition, on the job training, but Tufts students will be significantly more effective as foreign researchers to the extent that they are familiar with the region, the literature around key topics and the methodologies or best practices of the disciplines that shape their projects.

Coursework or internships in some aspects of African affairs and the requisite disciplinary approaches for the planned research proposal are very important. Students should begin exploring such choices with their advisors or among the International Research core faculty early in their careers at Tufts.

International Relations 91 / 92 " International Research Colloquium" and Tufts online International Research Network (IRN)

IR 91/ 92 is a web based and classroom course specifically targeting Sophomores in all disciplines. The sequence is designed to help students think about and plan for international research opportunities in anticipation of Junior year study abroad opportunities, and then to keep in touch while the students are abroad to provide guidance, mentoring and useful connections.

The goal is to prepare students to develop research while abroad that will serve as the basis for a range of scholarly outcomes: a Senior honors thesis, a Fulbright post-BA research proposal, a Borghesani Prize proposal, a senior research seminar or capstone project for a range of disciplinary or interdisciplinary majors or programs.

The **online International Research Network (IRN)** (<http://jupiter.tccs.tufts.edu>) provides a range of communication, digital library resources, research and information links designed to keep students focused and on track, to provide a secure location " a student backpack" store student research, digital photos, etc. for access in case of theft or file corruption.