

AAAS 2017 Annual Meeting AMA Series: Hi, we're Laura Acevedo and Hilal Lashuel; we are foreign-born scientists who are concerned about the harmful effects of the U.S. immigration policy on international science collaborations. AUA!

AAASmtg2017¹ and r/Science AMAs¹

¹Affiliation not available

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credited.

Given the importance of lobbyists in the USA, do you think there is a need for an 'academic lobby' or some sort of professional entity that might have enough clout to push policies that might help academia and research, in general. Im somewhat playing devils advocate here because I dont think the existence of such a system is good (that is, that lobbyists might have a great deal of power in swaying politicians to adopt policies that are their interests), but maybe its time to recognize that that's the way things are, and if we don't play that game, we'll be left on the sidelines.

[ar_604](#)

I couldn't agree more. I am not in favor of establishing academic lobbying organizations as this could lead to the politicization of science.

Personally, I would like to see the major national scientific societies and organization play a more active role in advocating for policies and programs that ensure continued investment in science and the development of policies that are based on the latest scientific findings and verifiable evidence.

If the leadership of all of these professional societies and organizations would work together and coordinate their efforts towards this goal, I believe that they will be able to exercise a great deal of power in influencing and shaping policies and regulations. At the same time, they need to do a better job educating their members about any new policies and laws and to develop effective mechanisms to engage them and when necessary mobilize them to defend science and the interest of society.

Dr. Hilal Lashuel

Can you give us some examples of projects you've worked on with international teams that help people understand 1) why it is important for scientists from around the world to be able to work together and 2) why online collaboration tools aren't enough

[firedrops](#)



Almost every project in my group involves collaboration with scientists outside Switzerland. In many cases, successful implementation of these projects requires exchange of students and post-docs to ensure effective transfer of knowledge, skills and techniques. This cannot be achieved by simply exchanging information over the Internet or via videoconferencing.

The Internet is an important tool and facilitator of international collaborations, but it does not allow for the group dynamic and side conversations and debates during the coffee breaks and dinner that usually lead to exciting collaborations.

My group is an integral member of a large international consortium that aims to develop novel biomarkers for early detection and monitoring disease progression of Parkinson's disease. This consortium is led by a foundation in the US and includes more than 20 academic research groups and companies from the US and other 8 other countries (e.g., UK, Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, Qatar, Italy, etc). Each group brings a unique set of expertise, technologies and tools. We all recognize that progress can only be achieved by working as a team and by integrating our expertise and the advances made in each research group. It is also noteworthy, that many of the technologies developed by the groups outside the US, do not exist in the US.

Dr. Hilal Lashuel

As scientists unaffiliated with US academic institutions, how does access to scholarly journals and articles work? Do your organizations pay for subscriptions or are you purchasing individual articles on a case-by-case basis?

Dr. Lashuel, are there public/open-access publishing requirements for research funded by the Swiss government?

[shiruken](#)

Our university pays institutional subscription fees, thus allowing everyone in the campus to access and download articles from the journals we subscribe to.

The leadership of our university has embraced open access in a big way. Our president is championing the cause of open data, open access and open software. (see his recent interview in German, which you can translate with google translate (<https://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/eth-lausanne-ein-bergsteiger-an-der-spitze-der-eth-lausanne-ld.145490>))

The main national research funding agency in Switzerland also "supports the principle of open electronic access to scientific knowledge nationally and internationally. The SNSF requires grantees to provide open access to research results obtained with the help of SNSF grants"
<http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/research-policies/open-access/Pages/default.aspx>

Dr. Hilal Lashuel

You choosing to cancel your trip seems to make the travel ban a self-fulfilling prophecy. This seems entirely counter-productive and like it will further fan the flames if many others continue to do so. Why not show how valuable international collaboration is by actually collaborating instead of willfully choosing to abstain? Don't you feel news bites along the lines of "scientists from X countries collaborated and did something awesome" would be substantially more effective for your cause?

[dopkick](#)

As I mentioned in the science article, I decided not to travel to the US, but I participated actively in the all the meetings of the consortium and the Summit via teleconference. I also made it clear at the end of

the article that I am against any calls for boycotting conferences at the US and will attend future meetings in the US.

The reasons for my decision not to attend are outlined in the article.
<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/355/6326/766>, please read it.

Dr. Hilal Lashuel

Is English still the most common international language in the scientific community? Do you see a shift towards another language in the future?

[MrFakhre](#)

Yes and I believe this will remain to be the case in the future.

Given this post-factual and populist time we live in, how can scientists around the globe help to regain interest from the public?

[La-Yu](#)

This is a very important point. Although the general public view of science and scientists is very favorable in the US and globally, I am equally concerned that further deepening the political divide in the US and other parts of the world will eventually lead to politicization of science. I believe that scientists can play an important role in bridging this divide by reframing the national debates on the basis of facts and verifiable evidence.

I also believe that scientists and scientific societies must take a more proactive approach to engage the public and educate them about their work, latest breakthroughs and their impact on society and the challenges we face today.

Having more scientists in public offices and the government would also help advance the cause of science.

Dr. Hilal Lashuel

A major source of international scientific collaboration comes from universities, not just from collaboration but also through foreign student programs. How do you see this executive order impacting universities? What is the general sentiment where you work?

Another temporary ban could easily destroy a student's semester, or even a year, not only can that be financially devastating for a student but it can also impact research, especially in fast-paced fields with a race to publish. Add to that the simple fear of being detained, especially at a young age, and I would think that American universities will see a significant drop in international applicants this year. Are people, especially those of college age, now hesitant of applying to or enrolling in American universities?

[kelvindexrees](#)

I work at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (<http://epfl.ch>) which was just named one of the top international universities in the world (<http://www.thelocal.ch/20170201/switzerland-boasts-top-two-most-international-universities-in-the-world>) . In my own research group, which consists of 15-20 members, at any given time we have between 10-13 different nationalities. This is true for most scientific groups here. Our ability to recruit talented international students is key to our success

and ability to advance science.

Indeed, the ban and uncertainties surrounding its implementation have already created turmoil with many students and scientists from these countries facing an uncertain future, especially those who are not able to return to their home countries (Yemen and Syria).

Grad students, postdocs with U.S. visas face uncertainty

<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/02/grad-students-postdocs-us-visas-face-uncertainty>

'We don't know what we are going to do': Yemeni students, unable to return home, face uncertain status in America

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/we-dont-know-what-we-are-going-to-do-yemeni-students-unable-to-return-home-face-uncertain-status-in-america/2017/02/14/496927d8-f204-11e6-8d72-263470bf0401_story.html?utm_term=.944bbab63ae8

If the travel ban is reinstated, I do expect that there will be a drop in the number of students applying to the US, including students who do not come from the 7 affected countries.

The general sentiment in Europe is that great majority of scientists and academics are against the ban. The scientific community in Europe, led by EMBO, launched the science solidarity initiative and hundreds of scientists responded immediately and offered to host students and scientists who are affected by the executive order.

The Science Solidarity. <http://www.embo.org/science-solidarity>

Dr. Hilal Lashuel

Thank you for the AMA and wonderful work on the piece. I have two questions: a. How important or effective do you think early interaction with scientists is on young students? b. Do you think that international interactions with scientists (facilitated by things like Skype, as an example), are beneficial or key in some way?

[Endless_Facepalm](#)

Thank you for asking this question. I would not be in academia and leading a research group today if I was not able to attend and present my work at international conferences as a young scientist.

I experienced the transformational power of conferences firsthand when I was a postdoc. Happily, my adviser entrusted me to speak about our lab's results at a major international conference. It went well, and I started going to more conferences. I found myself talking science with people I thought of as giants, and, to my surprise, they were interested in what I had to say. My confidence grew, and connections I made at meetings later led to my current faculty position. Even though the executive order is very problematic, I wouldn't want it to rob others of these types of experiences. I received my first job offer after giving a talk at a research symposium in Europe.

Dr. Hilal Lashuel

Would you say that national governments have a responsibility first to national defense and security or international scientific collaboration?

What suggestions would you make that achieve the stated security ends of the temporary suspension of immigration from the stated nations, while preserving your goals of open scientific collaboration?

[OHareOhHi](#)

I agree with you that the primary responsibility of any government is to ensure the security and wellbeing of its citizens. That being said, this can be done without abandoning our values and founding principles and without violating other people's rights and freedom.

The US government already has one of the most rigorous and effective systems to screen visa applicants, and it has been very effective as evidenced by the fact that not a single person from the seven countries named in the Executive Order has committed a terrorist act on US soil for the past 40 years. The problem with the travel ban is that it branded millions of people from these countries as terrorists simply because of their faith or country of origin.

Dr. Hilal Lashuel

Hi, I work in an MRI research lab in London, my Iranian PhD student has had an abstract accepted for a conference in Hawaii. Thanks to the recent executive order, he might not be allowed to enter the USA to present his work at the conference.

Are there any reports of boycotting conferences held in the states? I understand there would be little impact, but someone should take a stand and "scientists" are in a position to be heard.

[johnYarno](#)

Yes. Thousands of scholars have signed a petition calling to boycott academic conferences in the US. See, https://docs.google.com/a/insidehighered.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeNN_2HHREt1h-dm_CgWpFHw8NDPGLCkOwB4ILRFtKFJqI25w/viewform

Personally, I am against this boycott, and I believe that it is counterproductive, especially given the fact that every segment of the scientific community in the US have protested and spoke against the travel ban. Several top University have even challenged this ban in the courts.

"A letter from 171 scientific societies and institutions condemned the ban, and at least 8 universities have filed legal briefs to support lawsuits against the Trump administration" Source Nature <http://www.nature.com/news/academics-must-protest-against-trump-s-travel-ban-but-they-should-do-so-productively-1.21433>

51 Nobel laureates, tens of thousands of academics sign protest of Trump immigration order https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/01/27/eleven-nobel-laureates-thousands-of-academics-sign-protest-of-trump-immigration-order/?utm_term=.97c1477b0b9a

One more productive way to deal with the situation of your student is to ask the organizers of the conference to give him the opportunity to present his work via videoconference. In addition to featuring his work, he will have the opportunity to increase awareness about this issue and make the participant realize what they would lose if they are not able to interact with such talented young scientists.

Dr. Hilal Lashuel

What can the public do to foster the inclusivity of scientists that are affected by this type of government attitude?

[ukcin](#)

At this time, I believe that the most important role of the public is to 1) defend the American values of inclusivity, tolerance and openness and to speak up in a constructive fashion against any policies that discriminate against people based on their country of origin or religion; 2) express their support and solidarity with those who are affected and help them deal with the challenges they are facing as a

result of the travel ban; and 3) reach out to their representatives in government, especially those who are supporting the ban and make their voices heard.

I would love to see more constructive public discussions and debates on the merit of the travel ban take place in public forums, universities and churches. These discussions should be based on facts, what is in the best interest of the US and consistent with our values and founding principles.

Dr. Hilal Lashuel

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The Internet is an important tool and facilitator of international collaborations, but it does not allow for the group dynamic and side conversations and debates during the coffee breaks and dinner that usually lead to exciting collaborations.

I experienced this during the past three days. I attended two days meeting for an international consortium and a conference all via the Internet. I know that I missed a lot by not being there and would have had a richer experience if I had been there in person.

Dr. Hilal Lashuel