



# The Central Eurasian Studies Society

## Taskforce on Fieldwork Safety

### FINAL REPORT

5 March 2016

#### **Introductory remarks and acknowledgments**

1. This final report of the Central Eurasian Studies Society (CESS) Taskforce on Fieldwork Safety has been written to present existing perspectives on risk within Central Eurasian Studies and distill them in order to prompt an ongoing conversation in the community. While we make recommendations in our final section, these are far from suggesting that the debate must end. Fieldwork is necessarily an activity fraught with moral and practical dilemmas which can never be fully overcome but which are constantly navigated.
2. This opening remark, and the overall issues of fieldwork risk, raises particular issues for students and early-career researchers. One of the challenges of becoming a professional researcher is that of induction into this community of practice. Universities and research institutes are the bodies primarily responsible for this process, and they must be involved in training and supporting young researchers to prepare them for conducting research in a safe and productive way.
3. We recognize the impetus of the Board of the Central Eurasian Studies Society, and particularly the 2014-15 President Edward Schatz, in commissioning this study. We also thank a large number of academic colleagues – most of whom must remain unnamed here – for their helpful advice and recommendations. Finally, we must also acknowledge the number of unfortunate cases where researchers have fallen victim to the risks of fieldwork at the hands of governments and individuals that have felt threatened by scientific study.
4. The report is the product of a complex undertaking. Although each of us has extensive fieldwork experience in the region, our experiences vary considerably

and we also recognize that the experience of five researchers hardly represents the diversity of experiences that researchers in the region have had. Thus, rather than encouraging respondents to comment on specific types of risk or contexts, we asked general questions about perceptions of risk, actual experiences, and recommendations. If we or others conduct additional inquiry, we hope this information will facilitate more focused inquiry to addresses specific types of risks and their correlating causes/contexts. It is tempting to place the blame for risk wholly on one party—the academic researcher or the state enforcer. This, however, neglects the complexity of the situation. Academics should continue to explore all questions of human life and being. States and some individuals will continue to act as gate-keepers to the production of knowledge and occasionally seek to coercively ensure that alternative narratives to their own do not emerge. We should not assume that the scientific or scholarly nature of our work protects us from these questions of political rule. A certain naiveté with regard to fieldwork risk is no longer, if it ever was, acceptable.

### **Formation of taskforce and process of consultation**

5. Following a number of high-profile incidents of arrest, detention and/or harm to researchers conducting fieldwork in Central Eurasia, the board of CESS resolved to form a taskforce to investigate and report on fieldwork safety in the region and to recommend measures to mitigate risk. In Spring 2015, the President of CESS, Dr. Edward Schatz, recruited a five-person taskforce including:
  - Dr. Noor Borbieva, Department of Anthropology, Indiana Univ.-Purdue Univ. Fort Wayne;
  - Dr. Krista Goff, Department of History, University of Miami;
  - Dr. John Heathershaw, Department of Politics, University of Exeter (Chair);
  - Dr. Jennifer Murtazashvili, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh;
  - Dr. Chris Whitsel, Department of Sociology, North Dakota State University
  
6. Due to the constraints of workload and time, the taskforce decided to interpret the remit as a consultation exercise rather than a scientifically-designed work of research. This consultation exercise sought to garner the experiences and views found amongst active researchers of the Central Eurasian region and relevant professional bodies. Three modes of consultation were conducted:
  - a. An online survey of researchers, open to all, running from July-September 2015, composed of a mix of 34 open- and closed-answer questions, administered using Qualtrics software and hosted by Purdue University (see Appendix 1 for the questionnaire);
  - b. *Ad hoc* interviews with particular individuals who have addressed fieldwork safety concerns, either in their research or in the organization of conferences;
  - c. Consultation with professional societies regarding any relevant procedures that they have put in place and advice they make available to members.

In addition, we received a number of emails and written submissions which were solicited by Edward Schatz and John Heathershaw in an earlier consultation in 2014 and others which have been sent, unsolicited, since then.

7. The survey was opened by 321 people, with a maximum of 162 responses (Q #1) and a minimum of 96 responses (Q #20) to any single question. These discrepancies indicate two things. First, given that the survey did not have a unique login process, many individuals looked at the questionnaire and decided not to complete it, or more likely, returned to the survey later. Second, it seems that questionnaire fatigue and/or language difficulties led to a smaller number of responses to later questions. As a work of research the survey was flawed; as a work of consultation it achieved its aims of allowing a large variety of researchers from all over the world to provide inputs into the process.
8. Other forms of consultation were also pursued. A small number (13) of one-on-one interviews were completed, often under conditions of anonymity, and a greater number of informal conversations took place. Twenty of the most relevant academic societies from the humanities, social sciences and regional studies were consulted with a relatively low response rate achieved (a list of societies is included in the Appendix).

## Definitions

For the purpose of clarification, we offer the following definitions:

9. *Fieldwork*: Research undertaken in a given region of study while the researcher is physically in that region.
10. *Fieldwork risk*: Both “political” and “non-political” risks that affect the safety of researchers, research associates and research participants before, during and after a period of fieldwork. This includes the harassment and persecution of and violence towards researchers, research associates, and research participants by state representatives and political figures on the basis of the researchers’ (ethnic, gender, sexual) identity, the topic of research and/or legitimate activities associated with their research projects. It also includes non-state harassment, persecution and violence against researchers, research associates and research participants on the basis of their (ethnic, gender, sexual) identity, the topic of their research and/or the legitimate activities associated with their research projects. Ill health and risk from natural disasters and hazards, especially where state and public responses are non-existent or ineffective, may also be considered a fieldwork risk.
11. *Central Eurasia*: Includes Turkic, Mongolian, Iranian, Caucasian, Tibetan and other peoples. Geographically, Central Eurasia extends from of the Black Sea region, the Crimea, and the Caucasus in the west, through the Middle Volga region, Afghanistan, Central and Inner Asia, and on to south-eastern Siberia, Mongolia and Tibet in the east.
12. While these definitions give some sense of clarity, in reality they are subject to variations in understanding among scholars working in different national disciplinary contexts. In practice, respondents made references to places beyond

“Central Eurasia” and modes of research that do not fit our definition of fieldwork. Equally, there are some places within Central Eurasia which were under-represented, especially Tibet and Xinjiang. It is difficult to generalize within Central Eurasian Studies and its various academic fields. It is also important to recognize that the challenges in our region are not unique and are found in other difficult political environments where governance is uncertain, violence occasional, and government authoritarian. Therefore, we must be careful to avoid over-generalizing or essentializing our claims about fieldwork risk.

**Interim findings with regard to fieldwork experiences and perceptions of risk**

13. The overall perception of risk by survey respondents presents a mixed picture. When asked to assess the level of risk on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being low and 5 being high, the median response was 3 and the mean 3.07. Twenty-nine percent of respondents indicated 4 or 5 (higher risk) and twenty-two percent indicated 1 or 2 (lower risk).
14. Although the data collected were not varied enough to allow further analysis by categories such as age, gender, place of research, or citizenship, an additional analysis was made of responses from researchers who have local citizenship (from Central Asia, Russia, and the Caucasus). Among these researchers most believed risk has increased somewhat, and most respondents cited the reason to be changes in the political situation.
15. There is a majority perception the fieldwork risk has increased in recent years, both since 2005 and 2013.
  - a. A majority of respondents (56%) felt that fieldwork risk had increased since 2005, but a significant minority (20%) felt that it had decreased. The median response was “increased a small amount” (34%).

**Table 1: Change in fieldwork risk since 2005**

Answer	Response	%
Decreased a lot	10	8%
Decreased a small amount	15	12%
Not changed	28	23%
Increased a small amount	42	34%
Increased a lot	27	22%
Total	122	100%

- b. Almost half of respondents (49%) reported that fieldwork risk had increased since 2013 with just 9% reporting that it had decreased. The median response was “not changed” (39%).

**Table 2: Change in fieldwork risk since 2013**

Answer		Response	%
Decreased a lot		0	0%
Decreased a small amount		11	9%
Not changed		47	39%
Increased a small amount		44	37%
Increased a lot		17	14%
Total		119	100%

16. Many respondents indicated that certain, high-profile events have created a perception of increased risk. A very small number of respondents felt that these events were exceptional and occurred due to mistakes made by certain researchers. One noted that “Isolated events related to particular researchers’ disregard for local norms and political boundaries may have created the appearance of heightened risk, but the same provisions that have always remained advisable remain so.”
  
17. Interviewee and survey respondent views on why risk has increased – if they feel it has – varied. One prominent set of interpretations of the causes of heightened political risk relates to rising anti-Western sentiment. A number of respondents mentioned the general “burn out” among people who live in the region, in response to both “westerners” in general and western researchers in particular. One wrote of “fatigue” of foreign criticism since 2005. As a consequence, this respondent continues, “it became harder to get the trust of local institutions and to deal openly with Political issues.” Another noted, “discourse about the West, the US, and the NGO sector has dramatically changed.” Several respondents were concerned about “rising nationalism.” There also appears to be a certain level of disenchantment with foreigners, although it is not clear if this is a response to locals’ fears that they will face reprisals from their own governments if they associate with foreigners, or to changing perceptions of the dynamics typical of relationships with foreigners.
  
18. Many respondents reported stopping, postponing, or changing research because of perceived changes in the level of risk. A few respondents reported that they had to stop their research project, change it, or prematurely end data collection/research due to adverse experiences or concerns about their safety or that of their research assistants, because new laws were passed that made their topic more dangerous, or because they were told that they needed to stop. A couple of respondents stated that they were not able to publish their findings because they worried that their publications could endanger their informants. One researcher from Central Asia reported that s/he has avoided publishing his/her work because s/he is worried about the safety of family members in the region. Another researcher reported withholding a lot of information in academic publications because of very real concerns about some of his/her informants’ safety in Azerbaijan. This researcher was also told by an Azerbaijani governmental official abroad that s/he is unlikely to be welcome to conduct research in Azerbaijan in the future because of the political nature of his/her research.

19. An alternative view was that risk varied depending on both personal identity and on research topic.

- a. Regarding identity, researchers recognized the differences in risk that local researchers and research assistants face versus international researchers. A common statement was that the worst an international researcher would experience was being dismissed from the country.
- b. Many respondents expressed concern about the risk to research assistants related specifically to conducting research. Risks mentioned included those from conducting archival research, interviews, and focus groups, risks associated with the stress of conducting ethnographic research, and potential harm to a research assistant's reputation after publication, especially if assistants were co-authors. Some respondents felt that decisions could be made to reduce the risk to research assistants to zero or near-zero.
- c. Gender and sexual identity were cited as factors that increased risk. A number of self-identified female and homosexual respondents reported feeling at risk due to their personal identity. A number of responses indicated that this is not only a general problem but one which is exacerbated in the context of doing research. One respondent explains:

*I was mostly concerned with my bodily integrity as a woman. While this is my primary safety concern in the US and on my travels to other regions, during fieldwork it was a particular concern because I was actively seeking out informants, sharing my contact information with them, and meeting with them in conditions that were not always of my choosing. When I came to feel uncomfortable with certain informants, it was also a challenge to remove myself from the situation without jeopardizing my place or theirs in the community. This concern is, for me, particular to the fieldwork situation and, of course, shaped by my particular fieldwork situation.*

- d. Regarding topic, one respondent noted that "certain topics have changed in terms of level of risk associated with them, depending on the specific area." An interviewee commented that "there are now many skillful and experienced colleagues who are facing many difficulties that they did not before. This is not the case in all neighboring regions." A third person noted that, in this respect, topic matters: "if your research is not connected with political issues there will be no risk. If yes, it will be on a certain level impossible."
- e. Many respondents admitted to adjusting the presentation of their research topic to decrease risk. Some respondents indicated that they either do not disclose their real research topics to anyone or change how they describe their work depending on the context, whether a government institution, university, etc. For example, one researcher reported s/he was advised by a Russian colleague to pick an innocuous title for his or her research proposal to ensure access to archives and certain desired documents. Several researchers indicated that they don't discuss their project or purpose for being in the country with people who are not connected to their research project. A small minority reports

outright misrepresenting their purpose for being in-country, a practice that we find ill-advised. As several respondents pointed out, such misrepresentation doesn't guarantee that research assistants and helpers, including archivists, will not be harmed if the subsequently published research is found to be offensive by the local authorities.

- f. Several respondents reported that they adjusted their research topics, opting away from government-related or political topics, or adjusted their research methods in response to perceptions of risk. One respondent noted that he/she had difficulty conducting interviews and thus had to focus on archival sources instead; a few other respondents reported that they have learned how to phrase questions in a non-threatening or sensitive way. A couple of respondents indicated that the present environment makes them more wary about conducting research.

## 20. Risk varied by country and region.

- a. In Central Asia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are most often singled out as difficult places to work. Responses about Kyrgyzstan were mixed; some respondents said it is easier to work there now, others said it is more difficult. At least one respondent said conditions for research have become more difficult in Kazakhstan, while a number said conditions for research have improved there. The Caucasus reflect similar diversity: many respondents commented on the increasing authoritarianism in Azerbaijan, but the threat is much more acute for citizens of the country than for foreigners. The possibility of serious risk to foreign researchers in several states remains. The specific citizenship of the foreign researcher may matter a great deal. In future studies, it might be useful to construct questions that facilitate quantitative analysis of the relationship between researcher citizenship and perception of risk and between researcher country of specialization and perception of risk.
- b. Russia and Tajikistan were picked out as places with worsening conditions since 2013, perhaps reflecting the publicity given to cases such as that of Alexander Sodiqov and foreign researchers deported from Russia. "Tajikistan is perhaps registering the worse [*sic*] drop in researchers' safety," comments one respondent. A large number of respondents commented specifically on Russia, with one observing: "Russia has gone downhill and become highly unattractive for western academics due to the political climate."
- c. Several countries were identified by numerous respondents as too dangerous for research in the humanities and social sciences. Several respondents reported that they no longer work in Uzbekistan, particularly after the Andijon massacre. One person shifted from Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan and Russia for research since those sites were more reliable and open. A few respondents singled out Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan as sites where they have experienced significant censorship/restrictions, chosen not to go, or experienced difficulty going. Several respondents reported having funding applications declined due to the "political sensitivity" of research.

21. The consultation revealed a large number of reports of incidents of risk. In order to avoid double-counting we will report the number of incidents reported in the survey only, rather than including incidents from our individual interviews. A variety of incidents were reported in 150 responses to this question in the survey, including ten first-hand accounts of arrest and detention by state officials and a further seventeen of various forms of harassment of the researcher or assistants. In addition, there were ten reports of sexual assaults and homophobic violence and many reports of theft and other forms of petty crime. Forty-six respondents explicitly reported having experienced no major incidents.
22. The most prevalent concern among researchers was harassment by officials, whether local police officers or higher officials. Concern was voiced about having the correct paperwork to do research. "Political safety" was identified by one respondent as, "mak[ing] sure all forms and visas are correct, that an 'umbrella' exists for administrative protection, and that local authorities are notified of research". Some respondents noted that having proper documents does not help in cases where local officials are the source of harassment.
23. Many respondents mentioned concerns about general safety risks, including traffic safety, the threat of crime, and the lack of adequate healthcare. We did not study or analyze these responses because we understood our mandate to be to assess the risk of activities specifically related to research.
24. Concerns about confidentiality and/or the intimacy of the research environment were cited by several respondents as producing risk for both participants and researchers. One respondent elaborated:

*I am aware that the mentioned people will be inevitably associated with all my published research results in future as well, even though they have just limited influence on the final product. As in my research region everybody virtually knows everyone, and most people are in some way associated with different powerful local institutions and authorities, some people even holding parallel positions in several of them, I am sometimes afraid that if these agents do not like my research results, my assistant and host family members might suffer, maybe being denied access to important resources and job positions.*

### **Interim findings with regard to support and advice**

25. The consultation revealed that there is very little professional support currently available to researchers. The vast majority of respondents indicated that they received none or very little support from academic departments or professional societies regarding safety issues. Of those who received support, most cited training in methods courses and going through the IRB process as helpful.
26. Few of the twenty professional associations we consulted reported specific initiatives, training programs or support systems in place with regard to fieldwork risk. Many did not respond to the survey or provided a brief response by email saying that they do not work specifically on these issues and/or not specifically on fieldwork risks in the region. The British Association of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies recently consulted the British foreign ministry to seek support for researchers in Russia after several incidents of arrest and

deportation. It also expressed concern about the lack of awareness among researchers regarding risks.

27. The US-based Scholars at Risk and the UK-based Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA) respond to local academics who face risks to their life and liberty, whether or not these risks are a result of fieldwork or academic work in general. These organizations do not offer programs that specifically address the Central Eurasian region. CARA, for example, includes Central Asia within its Middle East region and is overwhelmed by cases of scholars fleeing the war in Syria and other conflict zones in that region.
28. Support for researchers came from four primary sources:
  - a. Graduate courses on research methods that cover issues of ethics and working with an IRB. Several respondents noted that such training focuses overwhelmingly on “do no harm” and research ethics (such as protecting informants) rather than on the safety of researchers.
  - b. Professional associations and funding bodies. Fulbright was reported to provide good safety training. These organizations also facilitate networking and word-of-mouth knowledge.
  - c. Support from doctoral committee members. However, it was frequently reported that respondents’ committee members could not provide specific advice regarding conditions in Central Eurasia as they did not have field experience in either the region or the specific countries and sites. Their advice was more general, but many respondents reported finding it useful to have advisors as a sounding board.
  - d. Word of mouth from researchers already in the field.
29. Many respondents highlighted how departments intending to support research actually ended up hindering researchers by creating an additional level of bureaucracy with which researchers are forced to struggle. Some respondents criticized the general nature of ethics advice and the lack of willingness to make allowances for the specifics of the region. One noted, “I did encounter a lot of obstruction from the Finance Department at [...] who couldn’t understand that in Uzbekistan people had to be paid anonymously in cash, not through banking channels.”
30. The general lack of training and awareness among researchers was also reflected in some unsettling evidence of a “blame game” about the responsibility for increased perception of risk. A small minority blamed researchers for recent incidents of risk. Several responses focused on “particular researchers’ disregard for local norms and political boundaries” (see para. 12) and implied that certain research topics are not advisable and that researchers should know better than to pursue them. On the other end of the spectrum, researchers were presented as victims of “anti-Western sentiment.” There was an apparent local-versus-foreign dynamic here, but it is not clear that all those blaming “particular researchers” were “local” (citizens and/or locally-based), or that all those blaming “rising nationalism” were “foreign” (citizens of another country and/or based overseas).

31. The above (para. 30) suggests a limited but concerning resistance to mutual understanding and sympathy among researchers. As our consultation shows, foreign and local researchers have experienced arrest and detention. These cases include both experienced individuals and first-time (or less-experienced) researchers. In some of these cases, sophisticated contingency plans were in place and a number of measures were taken to increase fieldwork safety in advance of the incident. These incidents may or may not indicate a trend in certain parts of the region, but they do demand academic solidarity in the face of serious dangers directly resulting from academic research.
32. In relation to discussions about whether it is recommended for researchers to change their research topics according to risk, one respondent, local to the region, commented that the issue of fieldwork risk relates to issues of academic politics and unequal knowledge production: "Currently, the region remains as passive recipients of the knowledge produced for others and by others. The balancing of this requires an academic debate rather than taking sides whether the academic freedom is threatened for the foreigners or locals."
33. The consultation suggests that researchers need to be more aware of political risk and carefully read the local situation if their research is at all political. However, this is no guarantee of safety. In certain contexts, such as those situations where local officials are engaged in harassment of researchers or the local population, researcher visibility may be detrimental to her/his safety and that of her/his informants. In other cases, visibility might serve a protective purpose. One respondent, commenting on Uzbekistan, noted:

*I have always done my best to avoid this by making my own work highly visible to authorities and to the people I work with. Indeed, on one occasion, a person I had recently approached as a potential host in a village setting took me to the local SNB office and presented me as a stranger who had turned up in order to see their reaction and cover himself. Having said this, in a country like Uzbekistan research of any sort might be construed as politically sensitive in the current political climate and therefore put participants at risk.*

34. There was some disagreement among self-identified "local" respondents about whether or not openness should extend to local government officials. Two respondents argued that researchers should introduce themselves to local officials and ask what they need to do to secure their support. However, others who did not have to work with local officials for their research (i.e., who were not studying them) reported that it is best to avoid contact with the police and local officials whenever possible.

35. Overall, the difficult question of informing and seeking consent from local authorities did not elicit consensus. Some researchers recommended maximal openness but others suggested secrecy. One researcher elaborated on the reasons to pursue a very visible position:

*Try to be transparent about your research goals and theoretical considerations. Choose your affiliations carefully. Do not be misled by the perception that everything can be done "informally" in this region. Formal ways are slower, but safer. This way you prove that your intentions are purely academic and you have no "hidden affiliations" (which may be found suspicious by the security services).*

36. The consultation also suggests that greater awareness is needed of risks to assistants and participants. Relevant questions in our survey were interpreted by many respondents as referring to the moral choice faced by researchers rather than the fact that research can have inadvertent consequences to which we need to attend. Some felt that risk to participants could be completely avoided. Others did not seem to understand that “participants” referred to the subjects of the research. This is concerning and suggests that an open and extensive conversation must take place among scholars working in the region in order to better understand and mitigate risks to research assistants and participants.
37. Some survey respondents felt that the role of local research assistants and associates in research projects must be reduced to protect them. One responded: “I am not willing to put assistants at risk for research. Assistants that I have trained to conduct interviews on my behalf are only asked to go to areas they feel comfortable with. They are involved in the selection of interviewees and sites. I do not feel that participants are put at risk.” However, respondents’ concerns about collaborative research design and co-authored publications highlight countervailing ethical imperatives. For researchers – foreign and local – committed to co-producing knowledge with long-standing colleagues the idea that certain individuals would be unacknowledged is ethically distasteful. Ethical imperatives may work at cross-purposes in some cases.
38. Responses included many practical tips about general travel safety and fieldwork including: Be aware of possible monitoring; Keep data safe; Do not record conversations; Protect anonymity of participants. Some of these tips are introduced in a routine manner in ethics/IRB procedures but may be difficult to implement.
39. Some of these tips (notably “do not record conversations”) are more controversial and present difficulties in certain circumstances. One researcher working in Kyrgyzstan in 2015 adopted a no-carry policy with regard to data following local advice that “spy-mania” meant that monitoring by authorities was increasing. “I felt like a caricature of a spy,” s/he reported. “I felt absurd, like someone who could be in a cartoon... and it was probably not even that effective. My RA one time said, ‘Do you want me to burn my notebook?’” It was also remarked that it is necessary to make funding agencies aware of the relationship between budget and safety.
40. A series of responses focused on learning the local context in the tradition of area studies research. Colleagues were advised to: Talk to experienced researchers; Learn a language that you can use; Learn about possible risks for yourself, research assistants, and participants; Learn about the cultural norms; Learn the legal context of the country in which you are working; Follow news reports to learn political and social context. Many of these imperatives seem obvious, but the time afforded to them may not always be sufficient.
41. A particular emphasis was placed on developing local contacts including trusted people in the community to consult for advice on how to conduct one’s research and assess risk and/or sensitivity of the topic. Respondents mentioned the desirability of identifying informal emergency contacts (local individuals one can

contact in case of emergencies) and formal emergency contacts (such as an embassy).

42. Several respondents indicated the value of advice from peers, those with specific experience and senior scholars. One commented:

*The forms of support and advice needed are very specific to Central Asia, and very few Central Asianists work in academic departments dedicated to the area. I think advice and training need to come from senior scholars who have worked in the region for many years and can act as mentors, perhaps through the auspices of CESS.*

43. Several respondents reported the need for advice with regard to gender-based risk and the current lack of awareness and/or support on this topic. One person noted:

*Gender issues and problems of doing research as a young woman in a patriarchal society are not openly discussed. I was only able to talk about these things with colleagues who are also my close friends. [...] It is very important to know how to behave in order to avoid such situations and how to defend oneself.*

44. One respondent argued that “local” researchers based at a foreign university need to reflect more on doing fieldwork “at home.”

*I feel that researchers coming from Central Asia, pursuing their PhDs abroad, but conducting research in their home countries are often not prepared at all when it comes to research ethics and their own safety. They often have not learned to assess and reflect fieldwork situations which seem "familiar" because they take place in their home country, but which are of a fundamentally different character because they are carrying out an academic study. They often do not understand that their role is a very different one from before and that people (officials, especially) will react towards them differently because of their research. They also often have unrealistic expectations of what their "governments" are capable of doing and self-censor their actions in an often unrealistic assumption of what kind of interest their study might garner in state officials at home. I feel that training should be compulsory for those students in regard of what it means to carrying out research "at home".*

### **Responses on the proposed website and other information-sharing mechanisms**

45. Regarding the idea of a web-based system of information sharing on fieldwork risks and safety, respondents were largely in favor. A clear majority (64%) favored such a site, with a significant numbers of maybes (27%), and just 9% against. Answers to this question revolved around issues of anonymity and security. There were also several specific tips about types of forums, topics, and venues that may be considered in further analysis (some of which have been taken up in the recommendations below). Some respondents also suggested moderating the website to weed out bias or stereotyped responses. Towards that end some suggested the website share both positive and negative information in case others have tips on how to safely complete fieldwork or up-to-date information about the resolution of safety issues.

46. Concerns were raised about the anonymity and security of such a website. Some respondents argued for anonymity, others that this would devalue the system. A further concern was raised about scare-mongering about the region in general, and fieldwork there in particular. One respondent elaborated as follows:

*I am slightly concerned that the existence of such a system presupposes that there is broad similarity in terms of risks across the region. While there are clearly commonalities across a number of these countries related to shared borders and shared histories, I still think that Tajikistan is substantially different from Kyrgyzstan, which is a world away from Afghanistan, etc. Are we producing this region as a region of risk if we group too many different areas together with one another to share safety information? There is a narrative out there that casts Central Eurasia as a politically unstable and dangerous region and I think this is a bit unfair--I would be very concerned if an information-sharing system became a means, even indirectly, of bolstering this perspective.*

47. In general, there was a great deal of demand for more support from those who self-identified as “graduate students” or “inexperienced researchers,” as reported in the previous section. However, this demand for support raises the question of whether to establish formal institutional mechanisms within CESS to supplement the (presently somewhat inadequate) support provided by many universities. It is tempting to think that the answer to this question is CESS, but several respondents raised reasonable objections. One response summarized the risks.

*The role of CESS is to improve awareness and knowledge of the issue not to provide institutional support. This risk is of supplanting the proper role of universities, creating legal and ethical division of responsibility, and adding another layer of democracy. It's also not really feasible.*

It is important that whatever support is offered by CESS this does not supplant or diminish the role of academic supervision on the part of universities and research institutions.

### **Preliminary recommendations to the CESS Board**

- A. CESS may appoint a board member with special responsibility for fieldwork risk and safety to coordinate the Society's work on these issues including the initiatives recommended below.
- B. A secure website with anonymity options and region- and thematic-specific tagging should be considered in more detail by a working group of CESS, under the board member responsible for fieldwork risk and safety. This may take the form of a discussion forum rather than an alert system. However, such an initiative comes with certain risks and should therefore be considered at length and with wider consultation before its introduction.
- C. CESS may support hubs in the field to serve as meeting places for researchers to swap notes on safety and risk as well as learn about each other's research. At present, such hubs exist informally but may not be known to all researchers. There is of course a danger of overkill in formalizing that which already works well informally. This proposal would need careful consideration.
- D. A regular fieldwork forum may be introduced to the CESS annual conference in paper sessions, a roundtable and/or speak-from-the-floor format to identify and highlight where there are recurrent issues across the region or in particular locales. Any such forum must seek full participation by locally-based and foreign researchers as well as equity of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and citizenship. Early career researchers and graduate students should also be represented.
- E. CESS may encourage and promote ad hoc events on themes related to fieldwork risk and safety including both in-person and online events.

### **The Taskforce offers the following general recommendation**

It is important that our universities exceed the bureaucratic minimum of the completion of IRB/ethics reviews and insurance forms and provide opportunities for the sharing of experiences among researchers. It is also essential that advisors and supervisors devote sufficient time to training and supporting their advisees and supervisees.

**Appendix: List of societies contacted during the consultation, June-September 2015**

American Academy of Religion  
American Anthropological Association  
American Association of Geographers  
American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages  
American Comparative Literature Association  
American Political Science Association  
Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies  
Association for the Study of Nationalities  
British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies  
British Association for the Study of Religions  
British International Studies Association  
British Sociological Association  
Canadian Political Science Association  
Central Eurasian Studies Society  
European Association for the Study of Religions  
European Association of Social Anthropologists  
European Consortium on Political Research  
European Society for Central Asian Studies  
European Sociological Association  
Law and Society Association  
Political Studies Association  
Society of Architectural Historians  
University Association for Contemporary European Studies