

# Dana Forum 2021

**MAY 4, 7 – 9 P.M.**  
**WEBINAR LINK**

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**Please join us** for the culminating presentations of the senior [Dana Scholars](#), who have engaged in year-long advocacy research in cooperation with [Scholars at Risk](#) and the [Center for Ethics](#).

*This event is free and open to the public. Guests will have an opportunity to submit questions during the event.*

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**The Dana Forum** is the senior capstone experience of the Dana Scholars program. The Forum promotes engaged citizenship and leadership to enrich the intellectual climate of the campus. Each year the Forum oversees the development of rigorous academic inquiry on issues of public concern tied to the Center for Ethics' annual theme. This year's Center for Ethics theme is Engaging in Speech and Action.

**Dana Director:** Mohsin Hashim

**Dana Forum Director:** 2020 - 2021: Lanethea Mathews-Schultz

**Center for Ethics Director:** Brian Mello

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**About "Engaging in Speech and Action"**

Hannah Arendt, following Aristotle, argued that the capacity to speak and act in the world constitutes distinctly human capabilities. Increasingly our moment, and our campus, is defined by growing concern about ways we impose on others and on ourselves limits to our capacity to speak and to act. In order to foster the capacity to speak and act in a time of increasing polarization, technological complexity and political uncertainty, this Center for Ethics program will support programs designed to engage the community in a series of events and development workshops that explicitly seek to build and foster speech and action.



## Going the Distance: Advocating for Ilham Tohti and the Uyghurs through the Framework of Citizen-Scholarship

Over the past several months, we have implemented an expansive campaign for the imprisoned Uyghur scholar, teacher and father, Ilham Tohti. Sentenced to life in prison in 2014 on a specious charge of separatism, Tohti was an outspoken advocate for Uyghur rights and cultural harmony. International governments, civil-society coalitions and global citizens have recognized the apparatuses of ethnic cleansing employed against the Uyghur population, including incendiary and accusatory state rhetoric, punitive intolerance for religious practices, alleged exploitation in global supply chains, mass internment and the targeting of high-profile spokespeople well-versed on Uyghur issues, Tohti among them.

Given Tohti's enmeshment in a network of political, economic and ethnic forces, we educated our audiences on the highly relevant contexts of Tohti's imprisonment while maintaining attention to our main mission: advocating for his release. Herein, we demonstrate how we structured our advocacy to accommodate breadth and depth. We also elaborate on the challenge of conveying our case to an audience predominantly composed of American college students, discussing how we contended with the issue of actual and perceived remoteness in bringing the mounting Uyghur crisis to a U.S. college campus amid a global pandemic. In the interest of articulating our project's alignment with the Dana ethos, we also discuss our growth as citizen-scholars alongside this project's intention of exporting that framework to the campus community. With our combined effort to educate and stir engagement in the mounting crisis Tohti represents, our work aspires to model how citizenship and scholarship can be integrated to make meaningful change.



### Presenters

**Alice Banta**, Theatre and Music  
**Mike Gataska**, Chemistry  
**Kaelyn Kappes**, Psychology and Theatre, French (minor)  
**Andrew Leahy**, English and Music  
**Kyra Hickey**, Dance, Women's & Gender Studies and Italian (minors)  
**Jessica Sommer**, Biology, Jewish Studies (minor)  
**Zoe Bentley**, Theatre and Music

## Overcoming Difficulties in Advocacy by Using Research to Amplify a Silenced Voice

Working through government channels is a common and effective strategy for international advocacy. However, this may not be viable in circumstances where foreign relations with the nation of interest are poor. Niloufar Bayani is an Iranian conservationist sentenced to 10 years in prison after the false accusation of espionage against Iran. In reality, sources believe that she was imprisoned for protesting Iranian nuclear and military weapons testing, as part of a larger movement by the government to silence Iranian environmentalists. This is a clear attack on her work as a conservationist and academic freedom at large. However, poor US-Iran relations have led her family to request that any advocacy on her behalf does not directly involve the United States government, making it difficult to pursue traditional methods to secure her release. This semester, we worked with Scholars at Risk to develop an advocacy strategy for Bayani's case which was independent of governmental agencies. Through speaking with experienced individuals and researching advocacy strategies, we developed multiple platforms of outreach including a social media campaign and an educational website. This strategy serves not only to promote and continue Bayani's work with the Persian Wildlife Foundation, which preceded her arrest, but to bring attention to her case while abiding by the wishes of her family and respecting the tumultuous history of US-Iran relations.



### Presenters

**Jaelyn Blonder**, Studio Art  
**Celia Bowers**, Environmental Science  
**Renee Heller**, Biology and Dance, Spanish (minor)  
**Jon Henry**, Neuroscience  
**Kayla Klarides**, Psychology  
**Jacob Metcalfe**, Chemistry and Mathematics  
**Miranda Robinson**, Biochemistry  
**Rebecca Shear**, Neuroscience

## Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba: Artistic Expression as Resistance to the Suppression of Academic Freedom

Artistic expression is a medium to declare resistance against injustice and oppression. In India specifically, there are restrictions against art to ensure the government remains in control. The government uses this control over minority groups, including violent attacks and severe restrictions on academic freedom. Scholars and advocates for minority groups in India, who have spoken out and resisted against the oppressive Bharatiya Janata Party, have been wrongfully imprisoned. One of these scholars is Gokarakonda Saibaba. While GN Saibaba was not arrested and imprisoned for his artistic expression, he uses his artistic expression to continue his advocacy for minority groups. GN Saibaba was a professor at Delhi University and continues to write poetry from his solitary confinement. His poetry deals with topics of injustices. Our advocacy group acts to continue the work of artists speaking out against oppression and imprisonment. Through mediums such as poetry, film, dance and literature, artistic expression is and continues to be a form of resistance against the suppression of academic freedom of scholars and advocates in India.



### Presenters

**Hannah Betz**, English and Music  
**Ryan Carey**, English, French (minor)  
**Amber Dietrich**, Dance and Mathematics  
**Lilianne Gering**, Dance and Business  
**Ellen Powers**, Theatre, Creative Writing (minor)  
**Olivia Ramsey**, Theatre, Business (minor)  
**Kerry Sullivan**, Theatre and Dance