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The Ivory International Relations Gap: To Bridge it?

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Science

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Abstract

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The current divide between the academic world of international relations and real world diplomat-decision makers of the field, is massively problematic. Decades of literature on the issue show an education experience that is esoteric and misleading. Drawing from examination of various sources, as well as from personal experience within the academic side of the field, this paper posits a couple actionable remedies to the issue.

Introduction

As a student in the last year of their Masters of Global Politics, I have become incredibly jaded about academia. Likely this is a result of years of academic burnout, but even so, it has highlighted an extremely glaring and puzzling fault in the academic field of international relations in particular. International Relations in modern Academia is extremely esoteric, self-inflating, and misleading.

If one loses their interest in international relations theory (as a completely burned-out and jaded student would be apt to do) a reasonable question to ask would be “what good is this information?” That question becomes more and more relevant the deeper a student progresses into the academic field of international relations. Classes start to build upon each-other, and papers feel empty and uninspired. Eventually, most students of the field will reach a stage where their professors will begin walking them through the process of becoming published, and entering into higher stages of academia, either through pursuance of a higher degree in the field, or to enter into teaching the field. The information international relations students are fed at this point is no longer a solution or tool from which to solve or alleviate a real world international relations problem or crisis. It is at this point, that students like myself realize that this field wasn’t really made for that, and has not really been preparing you for that.

This paper, and this action plan, is directed at academics in the field of political science, specifically international relations. I realize the gap is a two way issue, caused and propagated by both the academic side and the extra-academic side of the field. However, I have experience in the academic side of the field, and as a result of this gap, the academic side is realistically the only side that this paper would have any worth to. I realize I am critiquing the very organization that I am working towards a degree in, and that almost everyone reading this is more qualified

than me. This is why I have included a lengthy literature report for a paper more or less about “ditching” the literature.

The paper seeks to address the rift that has emerged and widened between international relations academia and actual foreign policy makers. It will examine the holes between international relations academic and the actual application of policy in the real world. Critically, it proposes actionable remedies to the issue.

Literature Review

The acknowledgement of this gap has existed for quite some time. The strength of this divide is ever increasing yet today. Despite this, many scholars have critiqued it, and many have offered potential solutions

Bad and Getting Worse

A pioneer of this aspect of the field is Alexander George. George's work was critical to the recognition of this problem, and remains a core element of critics of international relations academia. With his 1993 work, *Bridging the gap: Theory and practice in foreign policy*, George addresses a problem that many academically burned out students in the academic field of international relations have experienced: The academic side of foreign policy is a bubble, one that reinforces and inflates itself (George, 1993). Yet this bubble has limited use in external affairs, particularly so in the field of foreign policy makers. It is, as the title states, a field that generates theorem, not so much a field that generates tactics or strategies useful in practice.

George piece poignantly points out what I see and recognize as a glaring problem in foreign policy academia. The lack of utilitarian value that theories commonly studied and debated provide in the field of foreign policy is alarming. As someone who has served in both academia and as a policy maker, George encourages further knowledge of actor specific, and more flexible policies. Finally, he encourages an increase in communication and cooperation between the theorists and the practitioners in foreign policy. This piece serves as a great diagnosis of a problem from an inside source, as well as a detailed look into how to improve it. George's unique perspective on this matter is eye opening and valuable.

George's points continued to be echoed throughout the decades. Seven years later, Joseph Lepgold and Miroslav Nincic gave a similar outlook on the field of international relations academia. They cited ample evidence on the gap between academia and actual policy making (Nincic & Lepgold, 2000). Additionally, they cite that there is also a great desire among many top members of the field to bridge this gap. The need for policy relevant knowledge, cultivated

at the academic level, is very great. Though progress has been made on this issue, there is still a long ways to go, and more integration should ideally occur.

Shortly after the piece by Nincic and Leggold, their optimism for the will of the field to bridge the gap sharply subsided. International Relations/Foreign Policy academia became very coalesced and neatly subdivided (Tetlock, 2006). The mainstream theories are so prevalent, that they are what the majority of scholarly work is done upon. This strategy perhaps misses the point entirely. A Prime example of this was the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The expert opinions on both the evidence to invade and the consequences of said invasion have found themselves proven very inaccurate with the benefit of hindsight. A main contributor of this was that much of the political science knowledge was coming from specialists and academics who mainly deal in the promulgation of and defense of a singular theory. But in real world situation, these theories have little to no practical utility. The most useful knowledge base is often the most diverse, one that understands multiple facets of any situation. Additionally, a knowledge base that is rooted and involved in the situation itself is a far more accurate predictor and planner of the events to come. But these attributes starkly contrast to those touted and displayed by the international relations/foreign policy literature and scholarly work. Unfortunately, the strategy for much of the Iraq invasion was based off of these faulty theories and literature.

Another ten years later, Inanna Hamati-Ataya highlights how international relations theories have become esoteric, in her work *The "Problem of Values" and International Relations Scholarship: From Applied Reflexivity to Reflexivism*. International Relations theories grew more rigid and abstract as they were increasingly treated as more empirical sciences. Yet the field of international relations is far too diverse and nuanced to ever truly be empirical. Thus, in a quest to become more valid, international relations theories have lost much of their accuracy

and relevance. Theories that have become simplified to be more “correct” have lost the utility and applicability in the situations of the real world (Hamati-Ataya). This leads to a disappointing implementation of them in real world decision making scenarios. Sheltered in its bubble, there is a desperate need for more connection to the world within the academic side of the discipline.

Hamati Ataya’s and Tetlock’s pieces lack the optimism on the intent of the field to bridge the gap that was displayed by Nincic and Leggold. This is, in part because over the course of the last century, the influence of international relations international thinkers on real world decision makers has diminished greatly. Micheal C. Desch, in his work, *Cult of the irrelevant: The waning influence of Social Science on National Security*, proclaims that the academics of the field are now a meek shadow of what they were, having now reclosed themselves to their ivory tower (Desch, 2019). Academic theorists today make theories and “solutions” that are too absolutist and obtuse to be actually utilized in the messy realities of real time decision making. Desch idolized a Golden age, from World War One to the 1960s Cold War, in which rationalist theories reigned supreme and were a defining attribute of decision-makers’ policies. But the decline of influence has occurred for so long now that many view it as a constant

Completely Detached

As the scholarly side of the field has slipped further away from real world applications of diplomacy, so too has it fallen further out of touch with what skill-sets real world decision makers are looking for. The field of international relations/foreign policy is quite broad. Daniel Malinak writes in his piece, *Bridging the theory-practice divide in international relations*, there are many facets of it, and many separate subfields within the field. Each of these entities have different needs. Yet this field is often taught too broadly in universities, lacking any of this specification (Maliniak, 2020). This limits the transmissibility of academic knowledge to real world skills. Additionally, professional incentives are not really luring many from academia either. There needs to be greater communication and specialization for these to occur.

Another symptom of the seclusion on academia from the real world in international relations has been theoretical tribalism. The academic field of international relations has fallen foul of a phenomena that is fairly universal: It is easier to be loud than to be right. This rings true in the current age of increasingly polarized politics and social media influences. But it also permeates into academic, particularly so in the field of international relations/foreign policy. So many theories have garnered loyalty and become a mainstay; they are how academics are often evaluated and how they find success (Drezner, 2017). Scholars in the field back them up in a way akin to college fans backing their collegiate football team.

As a result of this, the promulgation of thought leaders-single idea/theory merchants has become more prevalent. Daniel W. Drezner argues that these thought leaders are now becoming drivers of the field, more-so than old fashioned public intellectuals (Drezner, 2017). Of course, this leads to the creation and fortifying of even stronger theories, and theories that are not very

malleable or adjustable; they are absolute. Their stoutness is their downfall though, because they are not malleable enough to be normally applied to real world diplomatic situations. The thought leaders and their influence on the almost tribal theories of international relations are a big reason as to why the gap between the academic scholars and the professional decision makers remains intact.

Joseph Nye said it best when he characterized the current “meta” of the international relations academic field as saying more and more about less and less. Finely honing and grinding down theories to more perfectly explain past events does little to provide any real utility for real time decision makers or diplomats (Nye, 2008). More emphasis needs to be put on real world relevance, less exclusively into academic debate, and perhaps most importantly, academia needs to encourage venturing outside of its sphere.

Academia in the field of international relations is not only esoteric, it is also self-exclusionary. Academia actively discourages leaving its bubble/sphere of influence. In international relations, scholars often find the most success and acclaim by debating established theories. Funds for research are most readily given out for this kind of work, and there are little opportunities through universities to readily reach out and extend to real world diplomats and decision makers. The bubble encapsulates and self inflates, preparing scholars to remain within the field of academia and not to extend their reach to the direct aid of foreign policy advisors or diplomats (Jentleson, 2002). It is almost as if you must pick a side, between professional diplomats or academics, and there is little cross over. Academia in the field is therefore not a training ground for the application of the practice in real world and real time scenarios, but rather a body that analyzes and reifies its own merits.

Theory Danger

Academic international relations theories as they exist today may be more dangerous than helpful. Ido Oren writes about this in his piece *The Leakage Between Political Science and Policy Goes Both Ways*. Diplomats and decision makers often use scholarly theories to justify their actions, perhaps even more so than they use them to plan their actions (Oren, 2021). These theories then serve as bailout mechanisms, and justification for bad implementation of policy, rather than proactive planning tools.

Tarak Barkawi offers a similar, if more bleak, outlook. He writes on this in his piece, *They Blinded Them With Science*. There is an over presence of broad and large theories in the field that get too quickly co-opted and adopted, leading to skewed views and damaging decisions (Barkawi, 2021). The problem of these theories have been being translated and applied to real world situations.

Oren actually took a similarly negative approach to Barkawi in an earlier work of his. In his 2013 work, *Our enemies and Us: America's rivalries and the making of political science*, Oren writes of the dangers of academic political theory, and how it has shaped specifically the problematic policy decisions of the United States. Oren's book serves as a precautionary piece for the influence that academia can have of actual real world decisions. It urges that academia recognize that their work WILL have real world influence, and to treat it as such, not to consider it an independent lab sample, removed from implementation. With hindsight of his later work, Oren views many of these decisions as faults of both sides of the field, but it shows how he also views the theoretical assumptions and mantras as dangerous.

The idea of theories being “dangerous” is not unique to Oren. There is an apparent incompatibility of academic political science theories and real world decision making (Musgrave, 2021). Political Science theories drafted by academics and taught in Universities are often ambitious and bold. However, they often lack nuance and can be very absolute. These theories are even dangerous when applied to real world situations, and have led to an increase in distrust between academics and policy makers.

There are multiple examples of international relations theory becoming too entrenched. These rigid theories have at times been adopted by policy makers. Often times, these rigid views have led to a worsening of crisis’s rather than an accurate prediction or preparation for them. Most prominent of these examples is the dominance of realist theory during the Cold War. This zero-sum, prisoner’s dilemma, war-game simulating package led to near nuclear disaster on a number of occasions, and placed enormous sole responsibility on state leaders who were often ill-equipped and incompetent (Erickson, 2015). It was detached from reality and the theory justifying and causing many blunders costing countless lives.

One of the more controversial international relations theories of recent history, many of which were promulgated in the confines of the academic bubble, was the Democratic Peace Theory. This theory is vague and broad, and often adjusted by history to better explain itself and justify its supremacy. Its insularity has led to disastrous implementation by decision makers in the real world (Ish-Shalom, 2013). Democratic Peace Theory was strongly adopted by both the United States and Israel near the turn of the century, and was used as a justification for the expansion of NATO, which continued the trend of the Cold War, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq (as well as Israeli expansion).

Christopher Hobson offers a further critique on the Democratic Peace Thesis and how widespread it has become. The Theory became more of a mantra, toted and brandished as a justification for military expansion. In academia the theory became hotly debated and nuanced, debating on methodological rigor and an increasingly narrow understanding of what democracy means. This lead to an improper view of the term that was incompatible with all but the major world powers of NATO, who would proceed to more or less use it as they saw fit (Hobson, 2017). If anything, the democratic peace thesis has become a vessel of neo-liberal capitalism as democratic institutions decline in major countries.

Staunch zero-sum realism and ostentatious implementation of the assumption of Democratic Peace Theory are both examples of the field of international relations being prone to the errors of theories. There are apparent cautions to establishing a closer linkage between the scholarly theorists and the real world decision makers of this field. Whether the problem lie in the side of the scholars, or in the side of the decision makers who utilize the works of scholars, there is perhaps an excess of insulation over the field as a whole. Academics can and should realize that their work is tangentially related to the real world, it is not contained entirely in the bubble of academia. As such, they must be very careful of the consequences of their work and its interpretations.

Exalted Few

One of the problems with isolation in international relations is how secluded the field can be. The East Coast of the United States is a hotspot of engaged political science institutions, both academically and professionally, particularly centered in and around D.C. Aside from this, there are some more specific and regional focused institutions, such as universities in Texas which have close ties to managing and advising relations with Mexico. But outside of these regions, in general, most universities have a lacking focus for the field of international relations.

The spotty concentration of the field creates an environment for which active and relevant schools of international relations are not available or accessible for most students. This is a problem, an imbalance, as there are many organizations and departments who are looking for people with expertise in this field. The few regions where this in-depth and developed international relations institutions exist do not adequately or diversely fulfill the needs of proper international relations education and preparation (Cook, et al, 2019). While this is a problem in the field of political science in general, it is highlighted by particularly in the specific sub-field of international relations.

Outside of the golden regions the field of international relations (and political science in general) is largely unorganized and lacking focus. Students who enter political science are often encouraged to enter the field of law, or to intern or staff for campaigns but outside of that, particularly the case with international relations, there is little focus or organization to motivate or guide students to actualize goals within their academic focus. At the graduate level, there is so little turnover, that most classes prepare students to pursue a further career in academia.

Proposed Solutions and Remedies

There have been many steps that have been proposed to alleviate the concerns of the issue. Perhaps first among this list is to get a better grasp of what bridging the gap actually entails. The concept of bridging the gap has persisted for quite some time now. In this time, it has become more of a vague mantra rather than a concrete goal. There is a lot of literature urging more focus on policy relevance, but the exact definition of that phrase is unclear (Gavin, 2015). What may be more necessary is a total restructuring of what advanced graduate training in the field of international relations entails.

Jessica D. Blankshain expounds on the idea of reforming advanced graduate training in international relations in her work, *Bridging the Other Side of the Gap: Teaching “Practical Theory” to Future Practitioners*. The academia gap exists largely because the paths to becoming a diplomat and becoming a scholar in the field of international relations can very seldom meet. There is not so much error in the theories taught by scholars of international relations, as there is a lack of understanding of how to implement them by decision makers and policy makers (Blankshain, 2021). On the other side of the bridge, many of these professional diplomats do not have the educational background to properly analyze and interpret the theories, as they did not come from the same educational background. This of course is a result of the lacking transmission between academia and diplomats, because the academic side of the field is a bubble that mostly prepares students to be future academics.

Another common issue that can be dealt with is openness and accessibility. Rebecca Adler Nissen is a great author on this matter. She places a great emphasis on the role of personality and social skills in decision making and diplomacy (Adler-Nissen, 2021). The reality is far more

banal than many theories or academics would have you believe. In the process of legitimizing political science, the field has perhaps become too much of a lab, and a return to more practical and even banal teachings, may be an improvement.

The art of diplomacy and efficacy in international relations is also far less scientific than a lecture at a university would have you believe. In actuality it is far more social and personable. This can be seen in the difficult online transition faced by many with COVID-19 protocols. The transition was not difficult because of the theoretical frameworks and assumptions, which transfer flawlessly to digital. It was difficult because it lacked the far more integral aspect of human personality (Adler-Nissen & Eggeling, 2021). Transitioning to digital highlighted the need for personability and social accessibility, two qualities the field lacks in its schooling.

In general, the academic world has gotten out of touch, a woe that the field of international relations is not immune from. So much of the knowledge and work created from academia is only really useful or utilized within academia. Bridging this gap, and creating knowledge that is more accessible, useable, and less elitist, could improve the condition. The field of academia has entrenched itself to be similarly esoteric in the realm of international relations/foreign policy, and could do as well in focusing on more utilitarian goals, instead of perpetuating a self-inflating bubble (Lupia, 2017).

The Gap between academia and the real world in the field of international relations/foreign policy was really brought to light with George's 1990 piece. However, since then, the problems he identified have only increased. Real world relevance and utility are still at critically low levels. Universities do little to incentivize engagement outside of academia, and journalists desperately require better evaluation of relevance in this field.

Action Plan

To remedy this dilemma, I suggest a two pronged approach. First, there is a need for reformation of the content taught in international relations degrees, which requires a lessening of theory study and an increase of more practical analysis. Secondly, there is also a need for universities and institutions to establish cooperative connections with diplomatic offices, NGOs, and state departments, in order to facilitate to provide more and easier pathways to gain relevant and wanted experience and more easily transition from academia into real world diplomatic and decision making positions. In addition, more long term changes about the culture and availability of this type of specialized and competent education should take place.

The First Approach: Reforming Within the Classroom

When I decided to major in political science, I did not know exactly what I wanted to do with it and how I wanted to apply my degree and major. Fairly quickly, I realized that I wanted to work on resolving conflict and dispute, and working for cooperation, and international relations was and is marketed as just that. From an outside perspective, from a common sense perspective, and from academic marketing of the subject matter, that is what I expected to get. I suspect many others did as well. But the content of this education is mostly a competing ground for theories, which are often applied as competing methodologies in a perverse form of game theory.

The intent of the theory study is for students to decide which theory best describes the situation, or most accurately proposes a solution to an issue. But because so much focus is placed on theories, the argument over theoretical supremacy often clouds the relevance of the solution to the problem at hand. In order to justify why a theory is better than another, students often must prove through hindsight why your particular theory has worked in the past. And because so much of the evaluation of the work is based off of theoretical standings, the most reliable way to succeed in a paper or project that analyses one of these situations is to pick a hardline approach following one of the theories. An argument is better when it is headstrong and confident, not when it is unsure of itself and wishy-washy, right?

International relations academia is a living organism, one that is constantly evolving and shifting. These shifts occur from internal disputes about the field. Mainly theoretical, these disputes have persisted and calcified, garnering themselves fiercely loyal defenders and proprietors. In doing so, they have generated a wealth of topics from which to debate each other with, and theoretical nuances from which to exploit and explore the frameworks of the fields. If

at any point the field was meant as a way to prepare and build knowledge for utilitarian use of international relations strategies and tactics, it has shifted so far from that. Now, international relations academia serves as a vessel from which to build more international relations academia. It's a feeding system for which to prepare more academic for the field, and the cycle continues.

Hence, the bubble is created, a bubble which is a forge of ideas and thinkers. Perhaps a very formidable bubble, but a bubble nonetheless. A bubble of frameworks that are built on the merits of hindsight, but, frameworks that fall apart under the scrutiny of real time decision making merits.

More practical and modern analysis needs to be done, involving problem solving and proposing solutions or strategies for current international dilemmas. Whilst this type of analysis is present in current international relations curriculums, but it hinges largely on the theoretical relevance of each analysis. That is to say, how well the paper is graded depends on how well it toes and understands the rigid theory driven way to understand and deal with problems.

Generally speaking, the current model international relations academic paper picks a theoretical camp, most often neo-liberalism or neo-realism, and explains how the theory says to solve or deal with the problem. Maybe, there will be some discussion as to why the other theories are wrong, or how their scope is too narrow to deal with the current problem. But that is about it; it is a simple and surefire way to do well in international relations courses, which are mostly papers that apply theory.

The problem with this, as is probably quite noticeable to anyone outside of the field, is just how small and insignificant this method of analysis and problem solving really is. There is an alarmingly small amount of tools in the toolbox. Students have a single handful of theories,

with two being used a vast majority of the time, and in order to reliably do well, must choose from one of these theories to both explain the problem and propose the solution. Most of the time, these theories propose similar answers to every problem, so it becomes a matter of copy paste regurgitate with mild situational edits. This is the formula that students are taught by instructors to write a good international relations analysis paper.

The main theories of international relations today are neo-realism and neo-liberalism. They serve as good indices of how much the field has evolved over its lifespan, as the main theories during its birth were realism and liberalism. Realism posits that every state is a selfish individual seeking power, liberalism contrasts this with the possibility of interstate cooperation. Neo-liberalism and neo-realism are these same theories just a little more balanced and closer to each other, with neo-realism acknowledging the importance of some economic interdependency, and neo-liberalism recognizing the influence of power politics. There are also some other theories such as constructionism, which is a broad category encompassing almost anything that critiques the structure and assumptions of established international relations theories or otherwise doesn't fit into the purview of the main theories. Marxist and feminist international relations theories exist as well, but these theories, apart from neo-realism and neo-liberalism, are all relatively supplemental.

The problem with these theories, which compose the majority of international relations academic content, is that they cannot explain or many and/or most political phenomena. They are bare bones, explaining only situations in vacuums stripped of real world context. This makes them almost useless outside of academic debate. Because of this, the field is static and outdated. But the academics of the field have refused to evolve or update their theories or terminologies. Too much emphasis is focused on understanding the old theories, and too little on new theory

building. Theory and the field must be dynamic, it must be adapting to modern changes, discoveries, and additions. As it exists, the majority of the international relations academic field has not shifted to face this new reality.

This is where so much of the disconnect between the ivory tower of academia and the real world diplomats and decision makers stems from. The rigid theory of academia, by which most of the curriculum work is conducted in and evaluated by, has less far less application outside of the bubble, and ill prepares students for more practical and applicable diplomatic work. Even something as simple mixing theories, taking for example one aspect of a solution from neoliberalism, but with a twist of constructivism to better fit the unique context of a certain situation, would help. But such a nuanced approach is generally not as well received as a more strict one theory approach.

So the prevalence of theoretical frameworks should subside if this issue is to be addressed. Obviously, the academic route in this field should still be a viable and valued. Theoretical debates, as well as teaching and understanding these principles that truly made the field what it is today, are absolutely necessary, and should not be purged. But if the field is to allow for deeper and more effective pathways out of the self-inflating bubble that it is currently, then it needs more than just that.

What is to replace or be added to the curriculum in pace of more theory based analysis? Well, more analysis, but not necessarily so rigidly based off of choosing a theory camp. Analysis that is sound, nuanced, and varied, but that are written effectively should be graded as such, and not down-graded because it doesn't stick thoroughly enough into a theory camp. Theory is good to learn, but we should not be solely beholden to it, and thesis's should be able to be drafted that do not adhere strictly to one theoretical camp. This would lessen the academic

sheen that currently plasters the field. Implementing these structural curriculum changes would make academic theory more compatible with real world utilitarian uses.

The Second Approach: Reaching Out of the Classroom

The other thing that should be added to curriculum require establishing better ties betwixt extra and intra curricular activities. Much like how in an economics degree, in a sociology or psychology degree, or most other social sciences, academic reports can be and often are published. While the content of the reports is always edited and overseen by a faculty member or committee of the university, the content within is at the least significantly made up of student work, and at the most nearly entirely student driven and orchestrated. These reports serve as advisement for city councils, medical fields, and generally experts in the field, or real world decision makers of the field.

I have done this kind of published work in economics classes for my minor in economics. We, as a class and under the guidance of our professor and head of the economics department, conducted research and drafted a strategy for the future economic development of the City of Eau Claire (Kemp, 2019). This extensive report was published by the university and presented to the Eau Claire city council by the students who drafted it. The report and presentation both served as a resume builder and as a way to carry influence and cooperation from the academic side of the field to real world applications. As a resume builder it as an example potential employers could review and a means of establishing connection with actual decision makers. As a direct line of communication and influence, though purely advisory, it linked the academic institution with real world applications and effects.

This type of cooperative and influential work is the type we should be doing more of in the field of international relations. A report such as this, submitted to a department of state or IGO, or NGO, advising on a strategy for an international relations dilemma, could be invaluable to bridging the gap, and giving students the ability and experience to cross over to extra-

academic content. For example, an graduate level international relations class could research and advise a report to NATO representatives on whether or not to expand into another country. Obviously, we are dealing with a difference of scale, but this is the kind of work that should be done, to better bridge this gap.

There is noticeably less of this in the field of political science. And this is a real disservice, as efforts like this are often collaborative, demanding negotiation and nuance, but still require a general course of advisement and/or action to be taken. This work has way more transference to real world positions within the field outside of academia, as most positions require group deliberation, not single minded tangents of a possible solution that standard theory based papers promulgate. It also serves as an example of published work, which can be valuable for taking credit or showing relevance when searching for professional positions in the field outside of academia.

Of course, this type of work would necessitate deeper ties to these organizations that root from within the academia of the field of international relations field. But these ties don't exist, at least not in the same vein as some other fields who use them successfully. On the academic end, most of what students do, especially in the late years of a major in the field, or even more so in graduate work of the field, is done to prepare them for further contribution to the academic side of the field upon conclusion of their tenure as a student. This is what I referred to as the self-inflating bubble. And on the diplomat and decision maker side, the career people of the field outside of academia, do not treat member of the academic side with much reverence, in large part because of the rigid and inapplicable theory heavy work conducted there.

To lessen the impact of the gap, we must create bridges across it. These bridges allow transition from academia to diplomatic positions. To do this, we must construct elements of

academia whose sole purpose is the fulfillment of this second prong. Here I again take inspiration from other social science fields. A faculty member or members of international relations departments in universities, whose responsibilities mainly involve creating and maintaining opportunities and openings for students of international relations, with non-academic organizations. These faculty members (professors ideally) would find the demand for professionals in the field, contact organizations about establishing programs and opportunities, and then relay this to the rest of the department so that curriculum can be constructed based around these needs. Such a method would allow a greater transition across the gap and out of the bubble.

There are numerous ways to potentially go about this. For example, universities could offer rotating positions, where a professional from the field outside of academia takes it for three-five years before going back to think tanks/Fed work. This way, the individual could offer unique and first hand insight into their part of the field, having a knowledge base from which to establish adequate and relevant course work. This course work could be a joint project overseen by the rotating professor that could be published or used to develop a strategy plan or advise for the agencies the professor came from. At the least, this kind of work could be useful to students in giving examples of their skillset, and their work and cooperation with the rotating professor could be used as reference points for their skills, giving them possible connections into the field outside of academia.

Long Term Changes

Some may posit that I and other student who are frustrated with the status of the curriculum have only themselves to blame. I am, pending the publishing of this paper, a graduate of a Masters of Political Science, who does not have a specialized international relations degree, but rather a more generalized global politics degree. There are schools that exist whose main purpose is more or less what I have proposed in this paper, schools who specialize in creating these ties to real world decision making institutions, so why shouldn't I and other students who share my frustrations go to these schools?

Those who would levy this kind of critique this are missing the bigger picture. Most of the academic institutions whose curriculum pertains to this topic fall more into my camp than into those exalted few exceptions (Koppel, 2021). And those specialized institutions are often not very accessible, nor do they meet the demand from the field for specialized students. They are geographically isolated, and thus functionally perpetuate an elitist and exclusionary aspect of the field. I am calling for an increase in accessibility to this transmissibility between intra- and extra academic aspects of the field of international relations. Closing the gap can be done through more normalization of this process, not by clinging to the existing few organizations who facilitate it.

First off, to combat the localized structure of international relations, the field of political science (international relations particularly) needs to organize. Students are not properly socialized, as often political science is not aptly explained or emphasized. Goals needs to be more actualized for students, as currently pathways out of academia in the field are relatively limited. A more organized and collective approach could do this, but many institutions do not have a culture that cares or emphasizes this. In order to have more readily available and proper

international relations course content, which adequately prepares and exposes students to the field outside of the bubble, this kind of long form change needs to take place across institutions, not just in localized hotspots like D.C. While this change requires a long term cultural shift, there are slightly more immediate and actionable motions to be undertaken.

Rally Cry

This kind of service seems, from both my personal experience and from the research I have done in the literature review section of this paper, concernedly lacking in the field of international relations. I realize that this kind of critique could be levied against a bevy of social science academic programs and curriculum. It even fits the general narrative that most of college experience is esoteric and impractical, creating snooty experts rather than establishing qualified candidates for careers. But this is not a paper about those fields, or about the general state of education. This is a paper of international relations academia: the perversion and dominance of the all-encompassing academic bubble, and frankly my own frustrations with it. If what is said rings true and is relevant to other fields, perhaps they may take inspiration from what is written here. But I have researched and observed a distinctly lack of these transition elements, as well as an esoteric fortress of the academics within this field of international relations, and have developed a two-pronged approach tuned for remedying the maladies of this issue in this field specifically.

My call to action is to the academics of this field, so this sect of academia could be an example of how to make a better and more complete educational experience. Political Science and international relations department should not shy away from a task because it is out of the norm, but rather should rise up and tackle it, becoming a more complete, cohesive, and organized discipline. International relations specifically, as it is the focal point of this paper, should be a valued and respected field of expertise, whose educational input carries great weight both within and outside of academic circles. As a product of this education, graduates should be at least afforded ample opportunities to advise and assist in the real-world decisions of international relations. It is a paramount profession and in the best interest of society as a whole, but more

specifically and importantly, it is in the best interests of the academic field of international relations that diplomats and decision makers receive good education relevant to their careers from universities. To sum up in in a more exclamatory and dramatic way, this is our chance for political science and international relations departments to seize their glory and ensure their place amongst the stars.

Conclusion

The presence of a gap between the ivory tower of academia and the real world decision makers and diplomats in the fields of international relations/ has been evident for decades now. Many scholars and professionals of the field have contributed their knowledge and opinions on the matter. Yet the divide is not yet crossed, in fact it is getting worse

Steps can be taken to improve the situation. Structuring a more practical and modern curriculum of schooling in the field is a logical next step, involving a lessening of adherence to old structured theory analysis. Reaching out to state departments and international organizations or interest groups to create pathways for students to transition betwixt them and the universities is another. Overall culture changes are an obvious path to take as well. These changes should be taken, and not slept upon.

George Alexander beautifully eloquated the issue back in 1993. As a graduate student myself with hopes of working outside of academia in the field of international relations, the points that he and many other scholars of the field have made resonate with my frustrations. As a field of massive importance, the academia of international relations needs to evolve. These are steps to do just that.

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