

What's in an IR Program?

Written by Dylan Kissane

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DYLAN KISSANE, MAY 20 2014

Stephen Walt has a nice post up at *Foreign Policy* about the things you'll actually remember about IR when your B.A. is done and dusted. According to Walt, here are the five things you'll never forget:

1. Anarchy
2. The Balance of Power
3. Comparative Advantage
4. Misperception and Miscalculation
5. Social Construction

I'm happy to say that the POL 210 course at CEFAM includes all of these five, though perhaps it is a little light on comparative advantage and trading economics as the students all take enough macroeconomics to have this down pat.

Walt's list is nice but, looking back on my own B.A. in International Studies, I'd add a couple more to the list.

- Deterrence

Walt does mention this in his final paragraphs but it is something that I think students take away and apply in their post-graduation careers, whether in IR, business, or elsewhere. The function of deterrence in international politics closely mirrors experiences that students will have in business, in government, in public policy making, and in journalism – the sorts of sectors that often welcome graduates of IR programs.

- Nuclear Weapons

I have never forgotten my lectures in nuclear strategy and nuclear politics, and I hope that I impress the significance of atomic weapons and their game changing role on my students firmly enough that they won't forget, either.

- International History

Again, this is one that Walt mentions in passing but it is important. There's a line in Michael Crichton's novel *Timeline* that sticks with me: "If you don't know history, then you don't know anything. You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree." Kenneth Waltz has argued something similar previously, too. Without a knowledge of world history it is impossible to discuss the present and future that emerge from it.

- International Geography

Maybe it is my personal bug-bear but I think that a student leaving an IR program who has a good grasp of the physical and political geography of the world will retain that information – and use it – in the years after they graduate. Combining a good knowledge of geography and history with a strong knowledge of the key IR concepts that Walt outlines will provide for a stronger future applying what has been learnt.

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Of course, one of the problems that emerges when designing a course or a program in IR is that there is so much to fit in and so little that clearly can be left out. Most, if not all, programs will include what Walt lists and I think – with all the bias incumbent in the statement – that the best courses and programs demand a knowledge of the elements I have listed, too, in particular a knowledge of international history and international geography.

A question to close: what is missing from Walt's list and what is missing from mine?

About the author:

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