

Direction: Thessaloniki

Written by Dylan Kissane

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DYLAN KISSANE, MAR 25 2014

As I write this post I'm in the middle of an exceptionally busy week.

Well, maybe not 'exceptionally busy' because – school budgets being what they are and school resources being what they are – 'exceptionally busy' is becoming the norm, rather than the exception. To my already pretty heavy teaching schedule I've added another class as the professor is out sick for the rest of the semester, I've got a book contract pulling at my time, authors to corral for an edited collection, and in my role as the coordinator of the faculty here at CEFAM, I am working through the final phases of the semester teaching review process. It's goodbye to lunch breaks for a couple of days this week, and email-facilitated office hours by night in order that I don't fall too far behind.

Amidst all of this I have to fit in preparations for a short trip early next week to Greece for the World Congress of Political Science to be held in Thessaloniki. I'll be presenting the East Asia Crisis Simulation I wrote, tested, and fine-tuned here at CEFAM with students in the POL 210 class over the last couple of semesters. Having only ever worked with business students in this simulation, I'm looking forward to deploying it for participants who have studied political science and international relations, and I am genuinely interested to see how they react.

If I had to summarise the way that business students approach problem solving and negotiation – and the simulation is nothing if not a problem in search of a negotiated solution – I would say that they are incredibly pragmatic and solution focused. If told to find a solution inside of 90 minutes they might argue, debate, discuss and gripe for 80 of those minutes, but they will almost always offer some solution at the end of their time. I cannot recall a time when students didn't offer at least *something* to the professor when required. The need to deliver as asked seems ingrained in them, and the idea of coming back with an answer of 'I don't know' or 'I'm not sure' seems anathema to most.

I have a feeling that political science students will be a little different. For one, they emerge from a discipline where there is not necessarily a right or a wrong answer to anything. Sure, there is a foundation of knowledge that must be understood and there are theories that – agree with them or not – need to be read, mastered, and cogently critiqued before being discarded in favour of another, but one of the defining features of the social sciences is that things are contested. Unlike an accounting problem, a math problem, a finance exercise or an economics quiz, the social sciences are not necessarily something where there is one right answer and one wrong answer; many are the times that I have graded papers equally despite the student authors presenting essentially antonymic arguments. This is the nature of international relations and I suspect it will impact the way that the students approach the simulation, and how successfully they move towards a negotiated solution.

As well as the chance to run my simulation for a new audience, I am also looking forward to the trip itself. Having never been to Greece before I am hoping to fit in a couple of hours of sightseeing in the short time I am in country. I'm also looking forward to catching up with some colleagues I have not seen for a while, networking with a few professors presenting their work at the conference, and developing some new and hopefully fruitful professional relationships knowing, as I do, the value that these relationships can bring to my research and teaching in the future. I don't know how involved I will get in the social activities on the cards for the conference as, to be honest, I am not the most social of butterflies at these events. Yet it will be nice to be able to pass a couple of hours with similarly

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interested researchers and teachers even if it is a little more low key than the waterfront bars on Proxenou Koromila.

All in all, then, I'm hoping for some good things to come out of the trip to Greece. I might only be on the ground for less than 40 hours but it's going to be worth it to test the simulation, to make and re-make connections, and to remind myself that just because I am involved in teaching and learning international relations in a business school environment doesn't mean I cannot add value to the wider discipline. Bring on Thessaloniki!

About the author:

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