



POLICY ROUNDTABLE: How to Bridge the Gap Between Academics and Policymakers

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We asked some leading academics to discuss the need to branch out beyond the university to reach both policymakers and the public.

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1. Introduction: How Do We Bridge the Gap?

James Goldgeier

In 1993, Stanford Professor Alexander George published *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy*.¹ The project that I co-direct, which goes by the same name, as well as other related programs at a number of universities funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York,² are testimony to the influence George had on so many of us who are interested in connecting academic research to policy and public audiences. Hundreds of scholars have attended our Bridging the Gap New Era Workshop (NEW) for PhD students, now in its 13th year, and our International Policy Summer Institute (IPSI) for faculty, which we will hold for the 8th time in June.³ NEW focuses on helping emerging scholars develop policy-relevant questions and learn about a range of career options for PhD students who want to do policy-relevant work. IPSI is designed to give faculty members more tools to engage policy and public audiences.

We have learned through our work that university leaders across the country would like to see more of their faculty engage local, national, and international audiences beyond the ivory tower. In 2016, we convened 13 provosts from a variety of public and private universities to discuss ways to create incentives and resources on their campuses for this type of work.⁴

¹ Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1993).

² See the *Carnegie Reporter* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2014), https://www.carnegie.org/media/filer_public/83/c2/83c2aac2-0089-4426-b6c3-7f4e71c3f13a/ccny_creporter_2014_vol7no4.pdf.

³ For more on these programs, see www.bridgingthegaproject.org.

⁴ Summary of Meeting of University Provosts, 2016 at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/oB3omZyDTdFdHd2dRMnozeW12REE/view>.

In moments of great uncertainty, policymakers and the public turn to academics for ideas and solutions. After World War II, for example, the onset of the nuclear age created huge opportunities for figures such as Thomas Schelling, Bernard Brodie, Albert Wohlstetter, William Kaufmann, and others who held positions at universities but also had think tank and government connections.⁵ Nuclear war made great power war unwinnable, and these theorists made major contributions to the understanding of the requirements for mutual deterrence, such as the concept of “Mutual Assured Destruction” or MAD. As former Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg says, “policymaking is about putting ideas into practice, and universities are about generating ideas.”⁶

Many of the significant foreign policy theories and ideas that have circulated in the policy world and in public debate have come from academia: the end of history,⁷ the clash of civilizations,⁸ and, more recently, the so-called Thucydides trap.⁹ Liberalism’s theory that democracies don’t go to war with one another has influenced U.S. presidents since Woodrow Wilson. Bill Clinton’s 1994 National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement argued, for example: “The more that democracy and political and economic

⁵ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice,” *Political Psychology* 29, no. 4, (2008): 593-602.

⁶ James B. Steinberg, “Universities and Public Policy,” (Transcript of a presentation at the Presidents’ National Dialogue, University of Ottawa, Canada, Oct. 22, 2009), 3, <http://www.cips-cepi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/steinberg.pdf>.

⁷ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* 16, (Summer 1989): 3-18.

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1993-06-01/clash-civilizations>.

⁹ Graham Allison, “The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?” *The Atlantic*, Sept. 24, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>.

liberalization take hold in the world, particularly in countries of geostrategic importance to us, the safer our nation is likely to be and the more our people are likely to prosper.”¹⁰ One reason academic ideas penetrate government is that the United States has a long history of academics serving at high levels of government, including National Security Advisers McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Condoleezza Rice, as well as other government officials, such as Joseph Nye, Stephen Krasner, and Anne-Marie Slaughter.¹¹ And even foreign policy practitioners who have not come from academia often have backgrounds in political science or international relations either at the undergraduate or graduate level, where they took classes that exposed them to academic ideas.

Why Should Academics Seek to Bridge the Gap?

Many scholars go into academia because they have a passion for research and writing. They typically are not trained or even encouraged in their PhD programs to write for policy or public audiences. Yet, what we’ve learned from the applications to our Bridging the Gap training workshops is that there is a real hunger in the academy, particularly among younger scholars, to use academic expertise to influence policy audiences and public debates.

One reason to do this type of work is to reach a larger readership. Academic books and articles take a long time to write and are intended for a limited distribution. It can be

¹⁰ The White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, July, 1994, 2, <http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/1994.pdf>.

¹¹ James M. Goldgeier, “The Academic and Policy Worlds,” in Paul D. Williams, ed., *Security Studies: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2013), 555-567.

rewarding when shorter pieces spun off from that work reach a wider audience. After all, academics are in the business of educating others, and many would like to find ways to do so beyond their students and colleagues. American University professor Sarah Snyder describes in this roundtable how she used her expertise in the history of American foreign policy, particularly in the area of human rights, to produce pieces for the *Conversation*, which has a huge readership through its own platform as well as through republishing. Through this medium, she was able to reach tens of thousands of readers and share her knowledge and insights.

Particularly when seeking to educate the broader public based on their scholarly expertise, scholars should keep in mind that their value comes from that deep expertise. Snyder acknowledges that at first she worried about going on radio and television because she is not a pundit. But media outlets look for scholars precisely for this reason — because they are experts, not general commentators. And as Snyder found out, in addition to reaching the broader public, other scholars heard her commentary and invited her to present her work on their campuses.

Where Are the Opportunities?

University of Texas LBJ School professor Joshua Busby describes below writing for platforms like the *Duck of Minerva* and the *Monkey Cage*, the latter of which started as a blog in the George Washington University political science department and is now hosted by the *Washington Post*. Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy professor Monica Duffy Toft mentions outlets like *War on the Rocks* (which has become highly influential in the defense community) and *Lawfare*, which is widely read by folks in the national security and legal community. Her Fletcher colleague Dan Drezner has built an amazing public profile throughout his career, and now has a regular column for the *Washington Post*.

Another kind of writing that branches out beyond academia takes the form of producing papers for think tanks, as Busby discusses. Think tanks are not only excellent outlets for policy relevant work but are great ways to build policy networks. While most U.S.-based think tanks are located in Washington, D.C., there are important opportunities in other major American cities, such as the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in Palo Alto, although academics do not have to be located in these cities to connect to the think tanks.

As Busby and Toft discuss in their contributions to this roundtable, there are also a variety of ways that academics can gain policy experience, including fellowships such as the Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellowship (IAF), the American Political Science Association Congressional Fellowship, or working in government as a political or expert appointee. (International organizations also provide opportunities for the latter.) But as both of those contributors note, academics need to be able to tell policymakers what to do based on their substantive and theoretical knowledge, which can be hard for a scholar who has been trained to build and test theory. Toft writes that policymakers “need good — not perfect — answers fast, and they require clear predictions along with sound options for dealing with those crises.”

One personal anecdote illustrates this point perfectly: In my first week as an IAF at the Department of State in 1995, I delivered a requested policy memo to my boss, who said, “This is a great analysis, but what should we do?” And I thought to myself, “How the heck should I know? I’m an academic.” A year spent at the State Department and on the National Security Council staff taught me how. It also greatly informed my subsequent scholarship and teaching.

What Are the Costs to Academics?

Although some professional organizations, like the American Anthropological Association¹² and the American Sociological Association,¹³ encourage departments in their fields to consider how to count publicly engaged work as part of the tenure and promotion process, we are still in the early stages of agreeing on how to measure that impact. And as Toft notes, even if one is in a department or school that values this type of work, the external review process is likely to produce letters that focus exclusively on the evaluation of peer-reviewed academic work. The provosts who attended the 2016 Bridging the Gap workshop cited this as a major obstacle in providing incentives for more policy relevance and public engagement. This is also a challenge, as Toft argues, for interdisciplinary work, which might be essential for solving pressing problems but runs into problems in disciplinary departments that can sometimes suffer from a silo effect.

Snyder reminds us, as we consider how to promote greater scholarly public engagement, not to ignore the huge disparities in the numbers of men and women writing op-eds for major media outlets. She cites a *Washington Post* op-ed editor who revealed that 90

¹² AAA Guidelines for Tenure and Promotion Review: Communicating Public Scholarship in Anthropology at <http://www.americananthro.org/AdvanceYourCareer/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=21713&navItemNumber=582>

¹³ “What Counts? Evaluating Public Communication in Tenure and Promotion,” Final Report of the ASA Subcommittee on the Evaluation of Social Media and Public Communication in Sociology,” August 2016 at http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/tf_report_what_counts_evaluating_public_communication_in_tenure_and_promotion_final_august_2016.pdf.

percent of submissions came from men, an astonishing statistic. Another important issue that needs to be addressed, as Snyder points out, is that women whose work is visible on social media are subject to significant online harassment.

Conclusion

There are many opportunities for scholars to bridge the gap. Younger scholars, in particular, have shown eagerness to do so as one can see by perusing the *Monkey Cage*, *War on the Rocks*, the *Duck of Minerva*, the *Conversation*, and other great outlets that engage policy and public audiences. There are still academic departments that advise junior scholars to wait until after they are tenured to do this type of work. However, scholars who spend graduate school and the tenure-track writing narrow academic pieces will find it hard, after a dozen or more years, to suddenly write for such a different audience. No one who advocates for bridging the gap is suggesting that scholars abandon serious academic work to write op-eds or think tank reports. The goal is to do both well and use academic work to build a broader portfolio.

International Affairs schools are playing a major role in hiring faculty who do both academic and policy work, and particularly in valuing certain expertise that disciplinary departments have traditionally ignored. Political science turned its back on area studies some time ago, but International Affairs schools need experts on specific countries and regions for teaching purposes. These faculty members can also be critical for helping policymakers as well as the public understand places like China, Egypt, and North Korea, especially when conflict arises. History departments have devalued international diplomatic history, but in recent years, policy schools such as Harvard's JFK School, the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, the Fletcher School, and American University's School of International Service have lured leading diplomatic

historians to train future policymakers. The challenges of measuring impact on the public and in the policy arena for both the tenure and promotion processes won't go away. But encouraging faculty to bridge those gaps is a welcome feature of the international affairs school landscape, as indicated by the three great scholars who have contributed to this roundtable.

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2. On Policy Engagement and Academia: Five Approaches to Bridging the Gap

Joshua Busby

There has been no shortage of commentary in recent years lamenting the divide between policy and academia. Many academics have made insufficient efforts to make their work accessible to broader audiences while insights from those scholars who have tried to bridge the gap often languish unread.¹⁴ There are also challenges in traditional academic departments, particularly for junior scholars on tenure track, to doing policy relevant work because it is frequently not valued by senior colleagues.¹⁵

For those determined to press on, there are several formats and venues for doing policy relevant work. In this essay, I identify five different approaches that I have engaged in to make my work relevant to policy. I also reflect on the benefits and trade-offs inherent to each area. Those five approaches include short-form writing for the public, long-form writing for policy audiences, policy-oriented courses, grants and consulting work, and actual policy practice.

¹⁴ See, for example, Francis Gavin, “TNSR: Who We Are, What We Do, and Why You Should Care,” *Texas National Security Review*, Oct. 24, 2017, <https://tnsr.org/2017/10/tnsr-who-we-are-what-we-do-and-why-you-should-care/>; Stephen M. Walt, “Public Sphere Forum,” Social Science Research Center, Jul. 21, 2011, <http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/walt-international-affairs-and-the-public-sphere/>.

¹⁵ Cullen Hendrix, “Why Engagement Can’t Wait—Walt on Tenure and Bridging the Gap,” *Political Violence at a Glance*, Feb. 23, 2016, <http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2016/02/23/why-engagement-cant-wait-walt-on-tenure-and-bridging-the-gap/>.

But before examining each of these five areas, let's first ask some more fundamental questions about why academics should care about being involved in the policy world and look at some general advice about how to begin engaging with it.

We live in a period described by Tom Nichols as the “death of expertise.”¹⁶ With rumors and false information in ample supply on the internet, Nichols worries that the role of and appreciation for people with deep subject-matter expertise has diminished. With even leading political figures trucking in conspiracy theories and fringe websites, this development is not limited to the mass public.

As a consequence of declining confidence in expertise, the transmission belt of information to decision-makers who are persuaded by solid arguments and data has been somewhat upended. Keeping that observation in mind, if we, as academics, care about policy and about changing the world, we must be aware of this development when we step in the arena. We not only have to share what we know, but we may also need to make a more fulsome argument for why people should listen to us.

The question then becomes: What can we do to become more involved and have the ear of decision-makers? In the parlance of the musical *Hamilton*, what can a policy-curious academic do to be in the room where it happens?

Answering that question in turn triggers a set of other questions for scholars: What should we be learning and focusing on? Where should we go? With whom can we meet?

¹⁶ Tom Nichols, “The Death Of Expertise,” *The Federalist*, Jan. 17, 2014,

<http://thefederalist.com/2014/01/17/the-death-of-expertise/>; Tom Nichols, *The Death of Expertise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

To make ourselves more policy relevant might mean learning new methods or languages, or developing new areas of expertise, which can be achieved through arranging field work or study tours in specific locations. And, of course, academics could choose to attend policy-oriented conferences where they will meet other academics and policy-makers with similar interests. Given that most of what academics do is write, the choice will often come down to the topics we write about and the publications where we publish.

Ultimately, academics are only worth listening to if we have something substantive to say. Part of that includes having a distinct point of view. Sometimes, while pursuing that goal, scholars can become professional contrarians who take issue with established orthodoxies in order to set themselves apart. There are indeed audiences for that kind of work, but it often comes off as a mercenary approach. However one decides to go at it, scholars need to develop an argument or an approach that others can recognize.

It helps immensely if scholars choose a real world issue of great importance to the events of today or possible future realities. Stephen Van Evera offers this advice for dissertations and case selection. Problem-driven questions surrounding big issues likely produce more interesting scholarship than small bore, methods-driven questions.¹⁷

In academia these days, there are plenty of opportunities to let your policy freak flag fly and meet other like-minded thinkers. These include the New Era conference for graduate students,¹⁸ which is associated with the wider Bridging the Gap program at American

¹⁷ Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

¹⁸ “New Era Workshop,” Bridging the Gap, School of International Service, American University, accessed Jan. 16, 2018, <http://bridgingthegapproject.org/programs/new-era/>.

University,¹⁹ as well as gap-bridging efforts around the country at the University of Denver²⁰ and those supported by the Carnegie Corporation.²¹ Other long-standing programs such as the Summer Workshop on the Analysis of Military Operations and Strategy (SWAMOS) are also helpful for building networks with other policy-oriented scholars.²²

Before looking at the five ways to engage the policy world, a brief word of caution. In seeking to bridge the gap, scholars also have a responsibility, at the very least, to do no harm, with a sense of humility that they might be wrong and that the real world may confound. David Halberstam wrote about the “best and the brightest,” scholar-practitioners of impeccable credentials who were part of the intellectual class that embroiled the United States in Vietnam.²³ As the stigma of policy engagement recedes in academia, scholars would be wise to remember the limits of their own expertise and how poor implementation of ideas expertly conceived can still lead to failure. These warnings aside, scholars now have many different avenues and forums to engage with policy. May they use these channels wisely.

¹⁹ “Bridging the Gap,” School of International Service, American University, accessed Jan. 16, 2018, <http://bridgingthegaproject.org/>.

²⁰ Announcement of Carnegie Corporation of New York grant on bridging the Academic-Policy gap, University of Denver, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, Jan. 24, 2017, <https://www.du.edu/korbel/about/news/2016-carnegie-grant-bridging-gap.html>.

²¹ Announcement of Carnegie Corporation of New York grant to universities for innovative programs linking academia and policy, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Sep. 23, 2014, <https://www.carnegie.org/news/articles/bridging-the-gap-carnegie-corporation-of-new-york-awards-5-million-to-universities-for-innovative-programs-linking-academia-and-policy/>.

²² “Summer Workshop on the Analysis of Military Operations and Strategy,” Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, accessed Jan. 16, 2018, <http://www.siwps.org/swamos/>.

²³ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*. (New York: Random House, 1972).

1. Short-form Writing for the Public

Most of the writing scholars do comes in the form of long, peer-reviewed articles and books for specialized audiences. The readership and reach of both are necessarily limited to the people with training to understand the work and methods, not to mention those with access to paywalled journals. Short-form writing, including op-eds and blogging, is a way for scholars to translate their work into shorter, more accessible prose for a wider public audience.²⁴ Both are increasingly being embraced by academics.

I began blogging in the mid-2000s and since 2011 have been writing for the academic blog *Duck of Minerva*, including a six-part series of posts on this very topic that grew out of a similar session last year at the American Political Science Association (APSA) annual conference.²⁵ In recent years, I have also contributed consistently to the *Monkey Cage*, among other outlets, and have an active social media presence on Twitter and Facebook. The *Monkey Cage*, a blog hosted by the *Washington Post*, has become the premier short-form outlet for academics in large part because of the size of its readership.

With the professionalization and integration of blogs like the *Monkey Cage* into traditional media, it seems almost obligatory for scholars, particularly younger ones trying to make a name for themselves, to publish a short-form version of their longer peer-reviewed work.

²⁴ Joshua Busby, “Social Media and the Scholar in an Era of Hyper-Nationalism and Fake News,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50, no. 4 (October 2017): 1004-1007, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517001160>.

²⁵ Josh Busby, “Public Service: Part VI of VI in a Series,” *Duck of Minerva*, Mar. 2, 2017, <http://duckofminerva.com/2017/03/public-service-part-vi-of-vi-in-a-series.html>.

People may not have heard about a scholar's journal article but a digestible distillation of the argument in a blog or op-ed may pique their interest.

All of these efforts take time and energy. Scholars have to ask themselves what purposes are served by engaging in those activities. One benefit of publishing for the general public is that it can result in invitations to brief policymakers. Visibility can also lead to invitations to conferences, funding opportunities, and advances for books, all of which increase a scholar's reach. However, this type of short-form writing should not be mistaken for policy influence itself.

When writing op-eds or other commentary articles for the general public, there is a premium placed on being topical. Savvy scholars will anticipate events such as the annual conferences of the G20, climate negotiations, or other forums that are relevant to their specialization. This allows a person to pitch an idea to an outlet in advance so it can appear when interest is likely to be high. On the other hand, things can pop up suddenly, so those who are serious about being policy relevant need to periodically be prepared to drop everything when events happen and write a 1000-word piece on short notice.

One danger that is worth pointing out is how easy it is to allow one's self-esteem to be driven by metrics like pageviews, retweets, and likes. But unlike citation counts, no one will get tenure based on retweets, nor do social media metrics necessarily equate to policy influence.

2. Long-form Writing for Policy Audiences

It can be tempting to substitute in-depth long-form writing with shorter quick hits as discussed above. However, serious academics, even those deeply engaged with policy,

need a mix of publications. One way to maintain that balance while still engaging in policy-oriented scholarship is writing long-form papers for think tanks. Think tank papers often have readerships that exceed most academic papers and are also counted in Google Scholar. Some departments may even count them towards tenure, promotion, or metrics for awarding raises.

Getting a foot in the door of a think tank may be the hardest part of this type of policy engagement. Writing for or holding a fellowship at a think tank can sometimes be the result of knowing the right person, but there are other ways in. The more visibility a scholar has, the better chance they will have of being offered work in that venue. Once someone has written a few think tank papers, it can be easier to get other contracts and writing requests.

Some think tanks such as the Council on Foreign Relations and the Wilson Center have their own blogs. Offering to write a guest post for one of these is a great way to get to know some of the in-house scholars. Going to relevant conferences can also help generate professional networks that can help get a scholar on the think tank radar. I would encourage younger scholars to pursue membership in the Council on Foreign Relations' Term Member program and take part in their international and domestic trips. Short of that, engaging substantively with individuals at think tanks on social media is another approach to becoming a known quantity to them.

Writing a think tank piece can often be more time intensive than a peer-reviewed article, requiring multiple rounds of review, internally and externally, in-person meetings with expert reviewers, and, if you are lucky, a launch event. Getting line edits from very senior policymakers can be daunting and the arduous external review process has to be taken

very seriously. Think tanks are not afraid to pull the release of a paper if the work is not satisfactory.

One particular challenge in writing for think tanks — beyond the need to write in plain language for a non-scholarly audience — is coming up with policy solutions. Academics are trained to identify questions and puzzles, develop potential theories that could explain them, and apply appropriate, often sophisticated, methods to test those theories.

Academics are not, for the most part, trained to think about concrete policy solutions. Writing for policy often requires some understanding of program acronyms, funding lines, organizational charts, and other arcana of the policy process. Think tank papers will demand that authors say more than “Focus on X” or “Spend money on Y.” A think tank report will often require authors to have a decent understanding of the actors, offices, or programs that need to focus on X, how much more to spend on Y, and why those objectives are not being met at the moment.

Scholars who aim to seriously engage the policy community have to get out of their comfort zones and learn something about how things actually work in practice and what has and has not already been tried. Here, interviewing policy practitioners can be an important way to learn what is going on and get a feel for the process. Interviews also help build professional networks that may prove useful later on should a scholar wish to cross-over from academia.

3. Policy-oriented Courses

Another way for academics to bring policy into the university world is by developing applied courses as part of their teaching portfolio. These classes have the advantage of

preparing a whole new generation in subjects that overlap with the professor's areas of research as well as giving students hands-on experience in policy-oriented research. They also expand the reach of the scholar by enlisting a team of students who can do more research than the professor could accomplish on his or her own.

At the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas-Austin, we offer year-long courses for masters students on a specific policy topic where a client provides the school with the resources to support student travel for the project. For example, I recently carried out a course on Global Wildlife Conservation for the Congressional Research Service (CRS), in which my students wrote six CRS-style policy reports for senior CRS leadership. The students and I also developed professional relationships with the Wildlife Conservation Society and the World Wildlife Fund through the course. Those experiences can lead to connections for future policy engagement that students can take forward in their subsequent professional work.

At the end of the course, the students and I presented our findings to CRS senior leadership and wildlife conservation NGOs, and briefed staff and members of the Texas Congressional delegation on our work. I also co-authored two blog posts with students from the class in prominent outlets.²⁶

²⁶ For example, see Joshua Busby and Leo Carter, "Elephants are in danger. Our research could help save them." *Washington Post*, Nov. 18, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/09/23/elephants-are-in-danger-our-research-could-help-save-them/?utm_term=.e92a10bo4034;

Cameron Lagrone and Joshua Busby, "Is Wildlife Trafficking a National Security Threat?" *New Security Beat*, Jun. 10, 2015,

<https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2015/06/wildlife-trafficking-national-security-threat/>.

A previous year-long course on sectoral greenhouse gas emissions mitigation led to a series of policy and academic publications for me in outlets such as *Energy Research and Social Science*. It also culminated in writing for and collaborating with the Paulson Institute, the Stanley Foundation, and the Council on Foreign Relations.

Although these kinds of courses are gratifying for the reasons mentioned above, they are not without challenges. They represent a considerable amount of work to resource and manage. It is not easy to find clients willing to invest \$25,000 to \$50,000 to fund student travel. Even in the case of a supportive sponsor like CRS, I had to cobble together resources from other organizations to make it work.

There are other inherent challenges to running policy-oriented courses. Whenever a project is client-driven, it can be a challenge to align the student work with the interests of the client. In the case of CRS, they have a distinct style of writing that takes some time to learn.

Given the distribution of talent and motivation in any open enrollment class, the analytical products students produce often vary in quality. Students, even the generally high quality master's students, are sometimes imperfect agents for producing academic scholarship.

These reservations aside, courses like these are a tremendous opportunity to start a policy-oriented research program. Scholars can develop expertise in a new subject area by tasking smart students to research and write on topics of interest. With the right client, scholars also gain a better appreciation of how organizations and policy professionals in the issue area operate.

4. Grants and Consulting

Grants and consulting are closely related to the kinds of client-driven courses described above. Like those courses, grants and consulting provide resources for a scholar or team to produce research products that fit the needs and interests of the funders, whether in the form of a report, policy brief, an on-line multi-media website or “dashboard,” or other research material. Where they differ from client-driven courses is in their tendency to involve a higher commitment of resources and include a larger cohort of professional researchers, although grants and contracts can also provide support for students.

I have been fortunate to be part of two large multi-person, multi-million dollar research grants through the Department of Defense’s Minerva Initiative, the Climate Change and African Political Stability (CCAPS) and the Complex Emergencies and Political Stability in Asia (CEPSA) programs.

In my experience with the Minerva Initiative, the Department of Defense was interested in basic research that might later inform policy. That meant our research was relevant to the department but was not directly tied to on-going programs or operations. This arrangement had the virtue of providing us with ample research funds without much interference from the funders about how we carried out the work or what our findings were.

The Minerva grant afforded modest opportunities for direct engagement with policy folks throughout the grant. For example, our CCAPS research team held several workshops with invited guests from the Pentagon, participated in the annual Minerva research conferences, and held a final wrap-up briefing.

Consulting and grants pose their own challenges. Conceiving and carrying out these programs means the research team is committed to the funders over a period of years, including deliverables such as policy briefs, annual reports, trip reports, and research meetings. For scholars who often work on indefinite timelines guided only vaguely by deadlines, that can be difficult.

Harder still is coordinating a research team of individuals who are accustomed to working on their own time and who themselves are juggling a variety of research commitments. Getting a large research grant may require coordinating staff and graduate students, which means more administrative work, though many of these grants are complex enough to warrant full-time administrators.

Other consultancy arrangements involve more hands-on participation from the client. This arrangement might make the research product more closely tied to the policy process, and will likely mean that the client is more involved in how the research is conducted and the findings. The contracted research team may have less scope to pursue methods of their choosing or reach conclusions at odds with the client's perceived worldview.

My Minerva-funded and wider consulting experiences have been valuable. Having a significant amount of resources to hire research assistants and conduct fieldwork to study an important problem is an incredible opportunity. It was gratifying, for example, to see the work cited in prominent outlets like the reports of the Defense Science Board and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Ultimately, however, scholars have to reconcile themselves with that fact that they may never know what diffuse impact their ideas ultimately have on policy.

5. Public Service

A final option open to academics is actual public service. This is the ultimate way to bridge the gap between academics and policymakers — the academic actually becomes the policymaker, at least for a short-period of time.

Academics have deep subject-matter knowledge of particular issues and places. Unlike practitioners, they also often have the luxury of stepping back from the immediacy of the news cycle to examine wider structural dynamics when answering important questions such as why states go to war or looking at the impediments to and possibilities for international cooperation. These kinds of insights can inform policy by identifying the conditions under which policies typically succeed or fail. Public service can also sensitize scholars to how the policy process works and inform their later research.

Public service can take several forms, including a stint in government like those sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) through its International Affairs Fellowship (IAF) for younger scholars as well as the new fellowship for tenured scholars. The IAF is a route to government service that many prominent international relations scholars have availed themselves of.²⁷

The IAF is a year-long fellowship that places scholars in the U.S. federal government, for example, at the Pentagon or the State Department. Complementary IAF fellowships are available for those in government to spend a year at a think tank. There are also a variety of other CFR fellowships including placements in Canada and Japan or opportunities to

²⁷ “International Affairs Fellowship,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed Jan. 16, 2018,

<https://www.cfr.org/fellowships/international-affairs-fellowship>.

study nuclear issues.²⁸ The APSA Congressional Fellowship is another fellowship that places scholars in a congressional office for nine months.²⁹

Taking a year or two off to serve in government not only provides opportunities for public service but will make for better scholarship. Academics who spend time directly engaged in the policy process will have a better appreciation for the complexities involved. They will also be better able to reflect on how the various theories of international relations and foreign policy fare in current policy discussions.

Somewhat more tangential is working on a political campaign such as a U.S. presidential campaign. These campaigns are sometimes open to having academics participate in committees that draft policy papers for candidates. An academic may have subject matter expertise that a campaign finds valuable. Upstart campaigns by long-shot candidates short on foreign policy expertise may find academics provide them some gravitas and can help shape the candidate's foreign policy message.

Some committees may tackle more salient topics that are more central to the campaign. Although it is unclear how often these policy papers get read, they provide scholars with an opportunity to network with people more directly engaged in policy and get a feel for the kinds of proposals being discussed in the policy arena.

Some scholars may be lucky enough to have more regular contact with senior campaign staff and be on call to produce talking points, written material for press releases, and

²⁸ "Fellowship Page," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed Jan. 16, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/fellowships>.

²⁹ "Congressional Fellowship Program," American Political Science Association, accessed Jan. 16, 2018, <http://www.apsanet.org/cfp>.

speeches. Backing the right horse in an election can also potentially lead to a policy appointment if one's preferred candidate wins.

Engagement in political campaigns is time consuming and can require being an effective surrogate for the candidate, which can mean being available for emergent issues and campaigning in important primary and swing states. This is merely to point out the trade-offs associated with serious campaign-related policy engagement that may fit uneasily with the research and teaching demands of academia.

With the developments on the national and international stage of late, there is another option that academics, particularly women, should actively consider: running for office. Public service is important, and we need more people with wisdom, integrity, and grit to roll their sleeves up in support of causes greater than their own self-interest. In an era in which the politics of the moment seems ever more divorced from evidence and a commitment to serve, scholars who bring with them valuable knowledge and who care about the outcomes they study may find a second calling by not only bridging the gap but crossing it.³⁰

³⁰ Of course, there are other ways to directly apply one's expertise to solving global problems beyond public serve. This includes service in the private sphere, such as for NGOs or for-profit companies, or through artistic and journalistic endeavors. For example, in my spare time, I also lead a small NGO of returned Peace Corps volunteers who served in Ecuador. We support small community projects and try to help our community remain engaged with the Peace Corps and Ecuador.

Conclusion

While academics can do their level best to write accessibly and reach out proactively to policy audiences, scholars may never know if their ideas are influential and shape policy. Their influence may not be apparent. But this shouldn't dissuade them. After all, policymakers get their ideas from somewhere.

Given their specialized training and expertise, academics are well-placed to identify non-obvious patterns and relationships that can improve current policy and inspire future policy. The challenge for and onus on scholars goes well beyond becoming better writers and self-promotion. If academics are convinced that they have not just good ideas but perhaps better ideas, they have the responsibility to hone their craft and engage the world of policy.

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3. Bridging the Gap between Academia and the Public

Sarah B. Snyder

I am coming to the question of bridging the gap from a different perspective than my fellow contributors. For one thing, my disciplinary background is in history rather than political science, and, although tenured, I am at an earlier stage in my career. But most importantly, I am trying to reach a different audience: Rather than bridging a gap between scholars and policymakers, I am interested in spanning the divide between academia and a broader audience outside the proverbial ivory tower.

My experience with public engagement is limited. Up until twelve months ago, I made no effort to disseminate my academic research publicly. Why did I decline all interview requests that came my way? To begin with, I questioned my own expertise — was I really qualified to speak to a BBC reporter about the Cuban Missile Crisis? Sure, I taught the crisis, but I hadn't conducted archival research on the topic, making me doubt my suitability as an interviewee. Second, I worried that speaking with reporters or writing for a more popular audience would take up too much time; this was only compounded by my reservations about my knowledge. Finally, I questioned to what degree I would be rewarded for all of this effort. Would the time taken away from publishing, teaching, and service — the triad of academic promotion — pay off in any respect?

My attitude about public engagement changed in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election, when I began to perceive significant parallels between the presidential transition from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan, a topic on which I had published, and the transition from Barack Obama to Donald Trump. In response to this observation, I wrote an essay that argued that the coalition that defeated Ronald Reagan's first nominee to be Assistant

Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Ernest Lefever, could serve as a model for concerned activists today.³¹ It was published initially by *The Conversation* and then republished by the *Huffington Post* and *Salon.com* and has been read 11,500 times, a dramatically larger readership than I would have found in a traditional, academic outlet. Subsequently, my editors at *The Conversation* solicited a second piece that examined other failed cabinet nominations that occurred when the White House and the Senate were controlled by the same party, as they are now. I argued that the nominations that did not succeed had foundered on ethical rather than policy issues, suggesting that some critics' attention was being misdirected during the presidential transition.³² That piece, also published initially by *The Conversation*, was republished by *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Salon.com*, *Huffington Post*, and *Business Insider* and has been read just short of 43,000 times. In my view, the piece's wide readership showed that a demand existed for analysis and historical context. In the era of Trump, my students and readers want to know, has "X" ever happened before? And, if so, what were the consequences? My sense was that existing news outlets were not meeting those needs.

Further convinced that my scholarly research could add to domestic debates, I wrote two essays in July 2017 that responded to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's contention in remarks to State Department employees that promoting values "creates obstacles to our

³¹ Sarah B. Snyder, "An Activist's Playbook: How to Influence Trump's Cabinet and Policies," *The Conversation*, Dec. 7, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/an-activists-playbook-how-to-influence-trumps-cabinet-and-policies-69087>.

³² Sarah B. Snyder, "Four Key Times Presidential Nominees Failed to Gain Senate Confirmation," *The Conversation*, Jan. 10, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/four-key-times-presidential-nominees-failed-to-gain-senate-confirmation-70454>.

ability to advance our national security interests, our economic interests.”³³ The first essay analyzed how Congress could pressure the White House and State Department on human rights issues. It began as an effort to mark the 41st anniversary of the signing of the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976, which is important in my work on congressional activism on human rights, although it ended up focusing on recent Senate efforts to block arms sales to Saudi Arabia.³⁴ This essay garnered a much smaller number of views (2,200) and was republished by regional newspapers such as the *Houston Chronicle*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Connecticut Post*, rather than some of the national publications that had carried my earlier pieces. Yet, the essay, along with a separate response to Tillerson published in the *Washington Post*’s “Made by History” feature, led to two interview requests — to appear on the national radio program “On Point” and on a Sirius radio program.³⁵ These opportunities enabled me to talk about my forthcoming book *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* and to connect it with Trump and Tillerson’s attitudes toward human rights today. These radio interviews led to an invitation to present my new book project at Concordia University in Montreal. A historian at Concordia had heard the “On Point” interview via Vermont public radio. Thus, in the end, my effort to reach a broader audience for my work also gave me an opportunity to disseminate my research to new academic colleagues. Public engagement, therefore, can also be an excellent way to promote research to academic communities

³³ Rex W. Tillerson, “Remarks to U.S. Department of State Employees,” May 3, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/05/270620.htm>.

³⁴ Sarah B. Snyder, “Can Congress Pressure the White House on Human Rights?” *The Conversation*, July 6, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/can-congress-pressure-the-white-house-on-human-rights-79959>.

³⁵ Sarah B. Snyder, “Is the Trump Administration Abandoning Human Rights?” *Washington Post*, July 2, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/07/02/is-the-trump-administration-abandoning-human-rights/?utm_term=.ebbc19162afb.

beyond our existing networks.

Yet the question remains: Why should we as academics engage more with the public in the first place? To begin with, the impact of research on public life is increasingly important in terms of funding. This is particularly true for colleagues in the United Kingdom and other systems where academics must demonstrate the public benefit of government-funded research. Second, such efforts secure broader audiences for our work. For example, my first book has sold 957 copies, according to Cambridge University Press, whereas close to 57,000 people have read my three pieces in *The Conversation*.³⁶ Such efforts will enable us to achieve the goals of fostering a better-informed public and shifting debate toward analysis and away from hyperbole and hysteria. They may even impact policy formulation. Those from my discipline — history — can ensure that we are learning from the past in a rigorous way and not misusing the supposed lessons of history.

One major concern for academics who are inclined to disseminate their research findings through nonscholarly channels is the time commitment that it requires. I found that I actually needed far less time than I first had anticipated. Each piece took approximately one workday to research and draft. But what such efforts do require of academics is a disposition to work with editors to make their writing and scholarship accessible to a general readership, which can, at times, be challenging. In addition, one needs a willingness to put oneself out there — in Sheryl Sandberg’s formulation, to “lean in.”³⁷ I will admit that I was nervous about doing a live, national radio program. However, those of us who want to engage with the public but are hesitant should seek formal and

³⁶ At this time, “Made by History” does not track readership.

³⁷ Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, (New York: Knopf, 2013).

informal support from our networks. For example, many universities offer formal media training that can be taken advantage of. It can also be useful — and a confidence booster — to speak with friends and colleagues who have previously done national radio and television interviews.

I would like to close with a call for women and other unrepresented groups in major news outlets to seek out and accept more public engagement opportunities. An analysis of front page *New York Times* stories found that only 25 percent of sources were women.³⁸ One reason for this may be gendered media gatekeeping. A researcher analyzing the disparities in public outreach activities of Swiss scientists found that members of the media were far more likely to contact male scientists than female ones.³⁹ Certainly, having more female reporters and editors would help. The same study of *New York Times* stories found that articles authored by women relied upon male sources only twice as often as female sources.⁴⁰ But, in order to be seen as experts in their fields, women also need to put their research, and therefore themselves, out there more often.

An op-ed editor at the *Washington Post* reported that men submit nine times as many op-eds as women do.⁴¹ Self-selection is likely a key reason that women are currently underrepresented on the op-ed pages of major newspapers. One study found that over

³⁸ Tierney Sneed, “Women Underrepresented in Media Across Platforms, Report Finds,” *U.S. News & World Report*, Feb. 19, 2014, <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/02/19/women-under-represented-in-media-across-platforms-report-finds>.

³⁹ Fabienne Crettaz von Roten, “Gender Differences in Scientists’ Public Outreach and Engagement Activities,” *Science Communications*, 33, no. 1 (2011).

⁴⁰ Sneed, “Women.”

⁴¹ Deborah Howell, “An Op-Ed Need for Diverse Voices,” *Washington Post*, May 25, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/23/AR2008052302308.html>.

several months in 2011 women authored only 20 percent of the op-eds of the country's four leading newspapers, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.⁴² The *Washington Post* editor noted that men's submissions tended to be more "dinner party op-eds" rather than informed by deep research, suggesting that the disparity may be attributed to the same factors that produced what J. Scott Long called the "productivity puzzle": why women scientists published fewer journal articles but the ones that they did publish were cited more often. Women may decline a request to submit an op-ed unless they are confident in their ability to contribute something steeped in research.⁴³ Furthermore, researchers have found that women are more risk averse, which manifests in decreased inclination to run for political office and potentially a reluctance to put themselves and their scholarship out there.⁴⁴

A newer yet meaningful reason some women may be hesitant to accept or initiate broad dissemination of their work is the risk of online harassment. Although men overall face more harassment online, women are subject to more harassment via social media, suffer stalking and sexual harassment disproportionately, and are more likely to find their

⁴² Erika Fry, "It's 2012 Already: Why is Opinion Writing Still Mostly Male?: Byline Counts are Better, but not Much. How Come?" *Columbia Journalism Review*, May 29, 2012,

https://archives.cjr.org/behind_the_news/its_2012_already_why_is_opinio.php.

⁴³ J. Scott Long, "Measures of Sex Differences in Scientific Productivity," *Social Forces*, 71 (1992): 159-78; Fry, "It's 2012 Already."

⁴⁴ Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, "Girls Just Wanna Not Run: The Gender Gap in Young Americans' Political Ambition," American University School of Public Affairs, Mar. 2013,

https://www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/girls-just-wanna-not-run_policy-report.pdf; Alexandra van Geen, "Risk in the Background: How Men and Women Respond," Harvard Kennedy School, Women and Public Policy, <http://gap.hks.harvard.edu/risk-background-how-men-and-women-respond>. I thank Jennifer Nicoll

Victor, John Sides, Marc Lynch, and Seth Masket for sharing their thoughts on some of these questions.

harassment “extremely or very upsetting” than harassed men.⁴⁵ The risk of suffering harassment is real and may be magnified within a population already more risk averse. One way to diminish such threats is to increase the number of women writing op-eds and speaking as authorities in news articles.

I have shared my own minor success in public engagement as a means to convince others that the time required can be very worthwhile. The value here is not only to our own careers or the broader dissemination of knowledge. Increasing the visibility of women and other underrepresented groups as experts brings value to those communities in our profession and to society as a whole.⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ Maeve Duggan, “Online Harassment,” Pew Research Center Internet & Technology, Oct. 22, 2014, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/>. The study also found that young women suffer “disproportionately high levels” of online harassment, but as the women studied were between the ages of 18 and 24, that population is relevant to assessing academics’ decision making.

¹⁶ See for example, Lori Beaman, Esther Duflo, Rohini Pande, and Petia Topalova, “Female Leadership Raises Aspirations and Educational Attainment for Girls: A Policy Experiment in India,” *Science*, 335, no. 583, (Jan., 2012), DOI: 10.1126/science.1212382.

4. Making Academic Work Relevant to Policymakers

Monica Duffy Toft

As the international community faces tremendous change and upheaval, and the United States undergoes shifts in its foreign and domestic policies under the Trump administration, there is a critical need for sound and relevant advice on issues of national security. A key question is, what, if anything, do national security academics have to offer policymakers? The answer is, “quite a bit.” However, academics need to understand that what policymakers need is often quite different than what academics pursue and produce. The good news is that there does seem to be movement within the academy to analyze and write in ways, and on topics, that policymakers will find useful. Moreover, engaging with policymakers will only help to make academic research more relevant and interesting.

As someone who has advised the policy community for a number of years, it is clear that this community’s needs and demands are quite different from those of academics. Policymakers are often confronted with crises in quick succession. They need good — not perfect — answers fast, and they require clear predictions along with sound options for dealing with those crises. Above all, policymakers need analysis shorn of excessive detail. They will listen, and ask follow-up questions that are relevant to their needs.

Academics for their part face a different situation. For them it is not a matter of getting a problem solved, but getting it right. That means spending long hours in archives, analyzing data, reading relevant literature, surveying populations, or interviewing experts and decision-makers. Very often “getting it right” means updating or improving an earlier analysis or argument, not necessarily discovering practical applications in the real world. For example, suppose ten years ago a social scientist had written an influential article on

what sorts of military interventions are unlikely to succeed. In making her case, she developed and tested a statistical model, which showed that in a particular case, military interventions were much more likely than not to fail. That research would be useful to a policymaker grappling with whether to recommend to the president committing armed forces to help resolve a national security crisis.

However, academics might later argue there were errors in how the previous author collected data or in the model supported by her statistics. Their research might make interesting and useful academic contributions, but would be of interest to policymakers only if the errors suggested a different course of action. Very often, there are no new policy implications from such contributions. It is incentives like these that widen the gap between national security academics, who have a luxury of time but are under constant pressure to be more “scientific” (each generation entertaining a different conception of what “scientific” means), and policymakers, who are invariably pressed for time, and as such are primarily interested in what might work or, perhaps more importantly, what will not work when attempting to solve the problem at hand.

When Data Took Over Academia

Does this mean that policymakers and academics cannot engage one another? Hardly. In fact, some of the best national security scholarship is often that which is directly informed by what is happening in the world. Perhaps the best example is Graham Allison’s *Essence of Decision*, a book informed by the Cuban missile crisis, which Allison crafted into a theoretically-informed report that remains relevant today in both academic

and policy circles.⁴⁷ It remains a classic, highlighting that while external conditions and security contexts shift, perennial questions and national security dilemmas remain.

Allison's book is also worth reviewing because of its timing. It came out before the desktop computer revolution, and the spread of high level statistical and computational modeling that followed. This is especially evident with the development of the Singer and Small Correlates of War data set, first introduced in 1963 (and still going strong).⁴⁸ Within the political science discipline and the international relations subfield, a fetishizing of data became the norm as computational capacity continued to grow through the 1980s and 1990s and new data sets appeared. A similar phenomenon occurred with regional studies. Why learn a foreign language or travel overseas when you can build a data set and mine it from the comfort of your office? This trend toward data-informed analyses happened at the same time that history — particularly international and military history — diminished in stature. Just as qualitatively-informed research diminished in political science so did historical approaches, and with these trends so too did the ability of national security experts to speak clearly and effectively to policy makers.

This explains why Samuel Huntington, perhaps the most famous and accomplished political scientist, started the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies. He became concerned that academics were becoming untethered from national security policy as they developed ever more complex models and modelling. He therefore established a fellowship program to promote the best junior scholars and their research in the hopes

⁴⁷ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd edition (New York: Pearson, 1999).

⁴⁸ "History," The Correlates of War, accessed Feb. 1, 2018, <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/history>.

that scholarship would stay relevant to policy challenges and perhaps help to secure international peace and security.

The situation today is not as dire as it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s. No longer does data-driven analysis rule the day. Rather, international relations and security studies scholars recognize that sound analysis requires a variety of methods. Furthermore, history as a field of study has been undergoing a revival of sorts. Interestingly, this revival is not happening in traditional academic departments, but in schools of public policy where there is a recognition that most government decision-making — especially in national security — is conducted by way of historical reasoning and comparison. What better way to teach those skills than with historical methods and historians themselves?

Challenges Within the Academy Remain

Yet, despite some progress, significant and potentially costly gaps between the academy and the policy community, remain. This is due, in no small part, to tensions within the academy itself.

It is still difficult for academics to make the case that it pays to write for the policy community. This is especially true for junior scholars who, in order to get tenure, have to publish in academic journals and for academic presses. They are not rewarded for writing policy papers or opinion editorials. They could even be harmed by publishing such content, as some colleagues may think that it is not the job of academics to engage in policy debates or that they are wasting their time and should be devoting more to the scholarly enterprise. When letters are solicited for tenure reviews, these types of opinions may be reflected by the referees, thereby undermining the tenure outcome for candidates. It is clear to candidates for tenure that what matters first and foremost is the opinion of

fellow academics. The admonition “publish, and publish ‘scientifically’ or perish,” still looms large.

Unfortunately, even within public policy schools the letters that are sought for tenure and that count the most are those from fellow academics from within the different academic disciplines. They are the ones who can make the case that the candidate has (or has not) had a significant impact on the field. That is what comes first. Regardless of policy influence or experience, a junior academic will not be tenured without a substantial and significant (however defined) contribution to their academic discipline. The effect of this environment is that fewer academics consider writing and informing policy debates and policy makers than would otherwise be the case, at least at the junior level. The structure of incentives simply mitigates too strongly against it.

Such incentives (or disincentives) also mean that academics within the university system are only rarely taught how to think about policy challenges and how to communicate them effectively. Again, they are rewarded for writing for academic audiences, and end their essays with their theoretical, empirical, and methodological implications. If policy implications are included, they are so generic and anemic that a policymaker would have a hard time thinking through how exactly to operationalize them to effect any desired change. This is not to say that this sort of training cannot be done. Master’s students at schools of public policy and international affairs are taught policy evaluation and guided through the mechanics of writing for the policy community. PhD candidates in traditional academic departments, those with real expertise on an issue, are not. Again, their primary audience is fellow academics sitting in offices reading other fellow academics’ research —

and not many of them at that. The average American academic article garnered about three citations in 2010.⁴⁹

Policymakers Need Specific Guidance, not Generalizations

In addition to the difficulty of communicating effectively and concisely to the policy community, there is also the problem that much of what academics write increasingly involves a continued use of statistical analysis and sophisticated modelling that took off in the 1980s and 1990s. This has led to two problems. First, the outcomes tend to relate probabilistic outcomes and conditions that might contribute to war and peace as opposed to point predictions. Policymakers want guidance on particular cases at a particular moment, not generalizations across a set of cases. They want to know how to end the war in Syria, not how civil wars end in general. Moreover, few policymakers have been trained to recognize that probabilistic theories cannot be refuted by one or more counter-examples, which then often results in them rejecting scholarly models and findings.

Academic research has produced a multitude of data sets and corresponding analyses, each with its own definitions of war, peace, conflict, cooperation, alliances, trade embargoes, death, destruction, and the like. As a result, scholars often find themselves contradicting existing research, leaving both academics and policymakers scratching their heads about whether they can ever make generalizations across a number of cases. What is a policymaker to make of fundamental disagreements coming from academic research? If academics can't agree on the best way to terminate a war and maintain peace or how to

⁴⁹ See, Mark War and Michael Mabe, "The STM report: An overview of scientific and scholarly journal publishing," 3rd ed., International Association of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers, Nov. 2012, http://www.stm-assoc.org/2012_12_11_STM_Report_2012.pdf.

deter a rival to prevent war in the first place, then why should a policymaker turn to that literature to begin with? She is already pressed for time, why add confusion over what academics have to say on the matter to the mix?

Finally, we know that most issues that concern policymakers in the national security arena are a mix of political, economic, and social factors. Civil wars, for example, often emerge in states with fragile political institutions, failing or compromised economic systems, and cleavages that divide societies along ethnic, linguistic, racial, and/or religious lines. Yet, most scholars are trained in one discipline and publish in disciplinary journals. There is little cross fertilization or collaboration. So while economists tend to focus on the supply of goods and services in a society as the explanation for why a civil war emerges — there are too many workers and not enough jobs — political scientists will look to the structure of the political system, issues of equity, and whether and how elites or majorities prey upon minorities within a society causing them to rise up and challenge the system.

This specialization is further compounded by the tendency of scholars to research and publish alone, particularly in the non-economic social sciences. This practice does not allow for different sets of knowledge and expertise to inform the analysis in order to get a fuller and more appropriate sense of what is happening in the world that policymakers are trying to address. Once again, the incentive structure mitigates against the kind of collaboration that might support informed and accessible policies.

What Can be Done?

Given the gaps in time pressures, incentives, and interests between the academic community and the policy world, what can be done? We should first recognize that the

gap is not as large it was in the late 1980s and 1990s. There has been progress made both across the gap and within the academy.

Across the gap, perhaps most notably, there have been movements to fund academic research through The Minerva Research Initiative, which is “administered jointly by the Office of Basic Research and the Office of Policy at the U.S. Department of Defense, supports social science research aimed at improving our basic understanding of security, broadly defined.”⁵⁰ Second, opportunities to inform policy circles have grown through media platforms, including the *Duck of Minerva*, *Lawfare*, and *War on the Rocks*, regular features by Daniel Drezner and Stephen Walt for the *Washington Post* and *Foreign Policy* online respectively, as well as interest from prominent journalists and authors working to get academic research noticed and promoted, including the *New York Times*’ David Brooks, the *Washington Post*’s Shankar Vandantam, and Malcolm Gladwell.

Within the academy itself, there has been a move by academics to co-author more frequently, thereby drawing on broader expertise and avoiding a silo effect. Interdisciplinary work has been slower to gain traction, again because of the incentive structure of the tenure system, but it is not entirely absent. Universities and research institutes have been making strides to appoint “bridge” faculty who work across disciplinary departments. Some of the fastest growing institutions are schools of public policy and professional schools of international affairs, bastions of interdisciplinary work whose purpose is to ask policy-relevant questions and to answer those questions using the most appropriate methods and sources, rather than those dictated by disciplinary preferences and sometimes fads.

⁵⁰ The Minerva Research Initiative, accessed Feb. 1, 2018, <http://minerva.defense.gov/>.

Conclusion

Allow me to close by commenting on a final and perhaps graver problem, one that is related to the academic-policy gap and that itself suggests a solution. In the United States, the rise of science doubters — including evolution, climate change, vaccination skeptics, and even those who question that the earth is a sphere — has led to an increase in the rejection of “expert” advice and guidance of all sorts in favor of a quest for better authorities.

Given that the sciences are made of up communities of people who highly value critical thinking, this rejection of science as such comes as a rather depressing shock. The current U.S. presidential administration has placed people at the heads of agencies whose primary qualification is that they previously worked to oppose the existence or core mission of the same agency. This is the situation at the Departments of Interior, Energy, and State, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency. Many times objections from those discounting the scientific inquiry are framed as doubt over the “science” or “the facts.”⁵¹ But the opposition is actually energized not by doubt, but by certainty that an alternative authority — often an iconoclastic personality or a particular construction of a holy text such as the Bible — should be our guide for crafting policy.⁵²

The academic instinct is to confront doubters with more facts and more research. However, it seems that this confrontation will not work as the representation of an

⁵¹ See, for example, Neal F. Lane and Michael Riordan, “Trump’s Disdain for Science,” *New York Times*, Jan. 4, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/04/opinion/trump-disdain-science.html>.

⁵² *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective*, edited by [David N. Livingstone](#), [D. G. Hart](#), and [Mark A. Noll](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

opinion as expert actually lowers its persuasiveness in the minds of doubter audiences. How then should we work to overcome this war, if you will, against science and against issue-area experts?

In order to bridge the gap between the university and the policy world, we need to alter the structure of academic promotion and research production by incentivizing rather than punishing co-authorship and cross-disciplinary collaboration. This is beginning to happen and is having a positive, if slow, impact. But we need to add advocacy training to the mix. Researchers need to learn how to persuade audiences that are skeptical of their stock in trade and come to learn that having the right set of facts, though necessary, is not sufficient to change a doubter's mind. That kind of training can be incorporated into both policy schools and academia more generally so that national security students are armed with more than good facts, theories, and arguments, but armed also with empathy for a doubting audience and the patience and skill that is increasingly needed to make the difference in the world that we all seek a reality.

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