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The 2012 TRIP survey of international relations in Australia: one problem to rule us all

LEE MORGENBESSER^{1*}

This article analyses the results of the most recent and largest cross-national survey on the international relations discipline. Completed by scholars in 20 countries, the survey covered the areas of teaching, research, foreign policy, the profession, and the relationship between policy and academia. From an Australian perspective, the key findings include the strong link between what academics teach and research; the narrowing epistemological gap between the USA and Australia; the curious pessimism of scholars on a wide range of foreign policy issues; and the ability of scholars to define research quality independently of other national settings. The most significant and alarming finding, however, concerned how the present structure of the field is undermining scholars' attempt to forge closer, more influential ties with policy makers in Canberra. In fact, it is clear from the results that what academics research and how they go about it is actually counterintuitive to this goal. The article concludes with three recommendations aimed at rectifying this problem.

Keywords: Australia; international relations survey; policy; research; teaching

Introduction

This article analyses the results of the 2012 survey of the international relations (IR) discipline. Undertaken as part of the Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) project, the survey evaluated the teaching and research practices, foreign policy opinions, views of the profession and policy orientations of IR faculty in 20 countries. In addition to demonstrating the relationships between these areas of interest, the survey aimed to help bridge the perceived divide between IR scholars and practitioners. In this article, the survey will be examined from an Australian perspective. Using the results of our overseas counterparts and the 2008 TRIP survey for comparison, it identifies and analyses the key findings. It concludes on an ominous note by demonstrating that, despite wanting more influence on policy and policy makers, the present structure of the field in Australia undermines the fulfilment of this goal.

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To the extent that the respondents' views are representative of the wider field, this article considers five key findings of the 2012 TRIP survey. First, what IR academics research in Australia very much informs what they teach, so much so that an increase or decrease in the amount of research on a particular topic often translates into more or less time being devoted to it in IR courses. The second finding is the closing of the intellectual divide between the field in the USA and the rest of the world, including Australia. For so long, the hegemony of the US approach to political science, characterised by implicit epistemological and methodological assumptions, has been decried for its parochialism and negative impact on the wider discipline (see Smith 2002). The survey results are important because they show a small reconciliation of these differences. The major finding to emerge from a foreign policy standpoint was that the field in Australia is inexplicably more pessimistic than its international counterparts. This is clear to see on an entire range of foreign policy issues, including, notably, the future power of our most vital ally, the USA. Within the context of the IR profession itself, the key theme to emerge was the independence of the field when it comes to evaluating the quality of different journals, book publishers and outputs. The results demonstrate that Australian IR scholars are more than capable of formulating a distinctly national understanding of research quality. The final finding is by far the most alarming: the structure of the field is incapacitating our ability to forge a closer relationship with the policy makers. As will be shown, what we research and how we do it is actually counter-intuitive to increasing our influence in Canberra. The conclusion of the article will therefore propose three recommendations aimed at helping to rectify the problem. Before addressing these key findings, however, how the survey was designed as well as the demographics of the field in Australia will be discussed.

Survey design and demographics

The 2012 survey was the largest of the four conducted so far as part of the TRIP project. This time it included participants from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, France, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, the UK and the USA. The global response rate of IR academics was 3464 people (49.5 percent). Suitable participants were considered to be those with an active affiliation to a university, college or professional school who researched and/or taught an aspect of international politics. In Australia, the response rate was 58.9 percent (165 responses), which compared favourably to the likes of France (36.6 percent) and the USA (42.3 percent), but was considerably lower than Colombia (75.8 percent) and Brazil (71.5 percent). The survey included 87 questions across the areas of teaching, research, the discipline and foreign policy (for more details on the survey, see Maliniak, Peterson, and Tierney 2012).

Accordingly, the median age for IR scholars in Australia is 43 years, which aligns closely to the global average of 44 years (Question 14). As expected, the gender imbalance that has long characterised the field persisted, with female scholars comprising only 27 percent of the total (compared to 31 percent internationally). Although this imbalance is diminishing, the slow rate of change guarantees it will continue to be a generational problem (on the wider gender divide within IR, see Maliniak *et al.* 2008). There has, however, been a noticeable change in the professional ranks of Australian IR scholars. Since the 2008 survey, the number of academics holding senior positions—associate professor/reader or professor—has increased from 22 percent to 40 percent. This has been offset by a decline in the number of academics employed in the entry-level positions of lecturer and associate lecturer (Question 35). This upward shift has nevertheless brought the field closer to many of its anglophone counterparts, including the UK (55 percent), the USA (56 percent) and Canada (60 percent). The nationality of IR scholars in Australia is also less diverse than was recorded in the 2008 TRIP survey. According to the results, 53 percent originate from Australia, 19 percent from ‘other’ (most likely Europe), 18 percent from the UK and 9 percent from the USA. This trend is unlikely to continue given the incentives for academics to emigrate as a result of poor financial and employment conditions in Europe and the USA (see, for example, *Guardian*, February 7, 2010). The most alarming demographic concerns the fact that Australian scholars are *by far* the least polyglot of those surveyed. Compared to the global average of 22 percent, 49 percent of Australian IR scholars cannot understand another language well enough to conduct scholarly research. Furthermore, while 28 percent of IR scholars in New Zealand and 26 percent globally can speak at least two foreign languages, only 10 percent in Australia can do so. This is an acute problem which comes at a time when the teaching of foreign languages is declining in general and as Australia prepares itself for the ‘Asian century’.

Teaching: a product of research

In Australia, the survey recorded that 55 percent of academics had taught an undergraduate introductory IR course in the previous five years. This was very close to the global average, but in between the extremes of Israel (28 percent) and South Africa (71 percent). At the postgraduate level, this figure increased marginally to 63 percent for Master’s students, but decreased substantially to only 11 percent for PhD students. The latter result is to be expected, given the lack of emphasis on coursework for most PhD programs in Australia—although this is changing. Taken together, the academics estimated that they spent 42 percent of their time teaching, 36 percent conducting research, 9 percent volunteering for community service and 5 percent consulting (Question 19). Although the time devoted to the latter two components was lower than in

other countries, the amount of time spent teaching and researching was exactly on a par with the global average. By comparison, the largest disparities in time allocated for research and teaching were recorded in France (45 percent and 22 percent, respectively) and South Africa (26 percent and 45 percent, respectively). Depending on what the individual academic values more highly, there is something in these results for everyone to complain about.

Within these introductory IR courses, the survey revealed a large focus on area studies. Of the introductory IR courses where one or more classes are devoted to learning about a particular region, the top results were East Asia (33.9 percent), North America (27.2 percent) and South-East Asia (24.2 percent). With the exception of Eastern Europe, every region has either maintained its existing share of class time or seen an increase since the 2008 survey. Without a doubt, the distribution of time is indicative of the political and/or strategic significance attached to the region. This explains why Australian undergraduates study North America so extensively and why their US counterparts, in turn, study the Middle East and North Africa more than any other region. Similar results can be seen at the postgraduate level, where only 5.1 percent of IR Master's courses *do not* assign any class time to area studies. While the strong emphasis on area studies is likely to increase the knowledge students have of each region, it often comes at the cost of acquiring other skills, such as methodology or policy training. The general consensus amongst Australian postgraduate students is that this places them at a distinct disadvantage against their international peers. But, as Rhodes (2009, 14) rightly pointed out: 'one person's aversion to quantitative analysis is another person's transferable skills for the job market'.

Beyond area studies, the customary teaching of various IR paradigms also came into focus. The survey showed that there has been a decrease in recent years in the study of non-paradigmatic analysis in introductory IR courses, from 25 percent to 20 percent. Notwithstanding the possibility that this is simply a random variation, it nevertheless occurred against the background of a global increase. The remaining allocation of class time is subsequently distributed amongst the paradigms of realism (19 percent), liberalism (19 percent), 'other' (18 percent), constructivism (14 percent), Marxism (11 percent), the English school (9 percent) and feminism (8 percent). Despite its high standing, realism was the only paradigm that had not received an increased allocation of time since the last survey. In fact, in only 3 of the 10 countries—Ireland, Hong Kong and South Africa—that participated in the two most recent surveys did it increase. As the next section will confirm, this is due not only to teachers teaching what they research, but it is also symptomatic of the wider decline of realism since the end of the cold war (Donnelly 2000). Afterwards, the survey results will be analysed from the standpoint of Australia's foreign policy, the profession itself, and the debilitating relationship between the field and policy makers.

Research: an intellectual reconciliation?

There are strong consistencies between the teaching and research of IR in Australia. Scholars primarily carry out their research within the context of East Asia (21 percent), South-East Asia (13 percent), and cross-nationally (12 percent). One of the more noteworthy results is the decrease in the number of scholars primarily researching transnational actors and international organisations (from 15 percent to 7 percent). This is despite the intervening years best being characterised by the efforts of the Group of Twenty, International Monetary Fund and United Nations to deal with ongoing financial, debt and climate crises—all of which pose a risk for Australia. Another worrying trend is the decline in the number of scholars researching Oceania, either as a primary or secondary area of expertise. Once again, this comes despite the fact that successive federal governments have attached added importance to the region due to ongoing political instability. From these results, it is clear that, as a field, we risk a saturation of expertise in relation to some regions (for example, East Asia and North America), but a deficit in others.

On a more positive note, the survey shows that there has been a narrowing of the epistemological divide that has long separated the discipline in the USA and elsewhere, including Australia. In their analysis of the 2008 TRIP survey, Sharman and True (2011) questioned whether the USA represented an outlier in this respect or whether the results of the other countries were due to a collective (perhaps Commonwealth) identity. By considering the results of both surveys side by side, it becomes possible to answer this question with some certainty.

Table 1 shows that there has been a widespread increase in the number of scholars identifying themselves as post- and non-positivist, and a subsequent decrease in those identified as positivists. This is perhaps best expressed in the USA and Australia, which have undergone a five- and six-percent shift, respectively, towards bridging their epistemological differences (curiously, both Australia and New Zealand have managed to find an almost equal balance amongst the three epistemologies). More broadly, the findings seem to confirm that the USA is not an outlier in any respect. This is because 70 percent of scholars in Ireland and 60 percent of those in Singapore (both anglophone countries) nominated positivism as their epistemological preference. Moreover, amongst the non-anglophone countries, Argentina, Israel and Norway all have 50 percent or more scholars identifying their research as positivist-orientated.

On a related issue, conventional wisdom holds that the field in the USA is dominated by a positivist, quantitatively orientated approach to research, while its counterparts are mostly non-positivist and qualitatively inclined (see Tarrow 2010). As a matter of fact, the survey shows that the former method is most used in Norway, Mexico, Ireland and then the USA. For our part, only 29 percent of IR scholars in Australia employ the quantitative approach as either their primary or secondary method (compared to 88 percent for the qualitative approach). A similar methodological imbalance was also recorded in

Table 1. ‘In general, how would you characterise your work in epistemological terms?’ (Question 31, 2008 and Question 26, 2012) Note: All numbers are percentages

| Country | <i>Non-positivist</i> | | <i>Positivist</i> | | <i>Post-positivist</i> | |
|---------------|-----------------------|------|-------------------|------|------------------------|------|
| | 2008 | 2012 | 2008 | 2012 | 2008 | 2012 |
| All countries | 23 | 28 | 55 | 47 | 21 | 26 |
| USA | 18 | 21 | 65 | 59 | 17 | 20 |
| UK | 37 | 38 | 33 | 27 | 31 | 35 |
| Canada | 31 | 28 | 43 | 42 | 26 | 30 |
| Australia | 33 | 34 | 30 | 35 | 37 | 31 |
| New Zealand | 26 | 33 | 41 | 33 | 33 | 33 |
| Ireland | 21 | 7 | 61 | 70 | 18 | 23 |
| Israel | 4 | 15 | 79 | 62 | 18 | 23 |
| South Africa | 33 | 17 | 27 | 39 | 40 | 43 |
| Hong Kong | 18 | 27 | 71 | 64 | 12 | 9 |
| Singapore | 20 | 30 | 60 | 60 | 20 | 10 |
| France | | 36 | | 32 | | 32 |
| Denmark | | 48 | | 34 | | 18 |
| Finland | | 14 | | 14 | | 71 |
| Norway | | 21 | | 53 | | 26 |
| Sweden | | 39 | | 30 | | 31 |
| Turkey | | 30 | | 40 | | 30 |
| Argentina | | 37 | | 50 | | 13 |
| Brazil | | 44 | | 28 | | 29 |
| Colombia | | 30 | | 37 | | 33 |
| Mexico | | 33 | | 33 | | 34 |

Canada, New Zealand and the UK, which undercuts to some degree the claim that perceived US hegemony of the discipline subsequently produces wider methodological conformity (see Smith 2002; Waever 1998). Instead, the result is evidence of the more eclectic methodological approach that the field in Australia has often adopted by borrowing from both the US and British traditions. Having said that, the methodological gap between Australia and the USA has narrowed by 17 percent since the 2008 survey. Given that a similar trend occurred at an epistemological level, one might argue that the field in Australia is beginning to follow more closely the US ‘scientific’ model of political science. But a more likely explanation is that this change is part of a recurring historical pattern, whereby the methodological preferences of Australian IR scholars constantly shift as the field attempts to navigate two juxtaposed intellectual orientations (see Devetak 2009, 349–359).

In addition to epistemology and methodology, the survey took into account the different IR paradigms scholars adopt in their research. Reinforcing what occurred within the realm of teaching, those subscribing to non-paradigmatic analysis decreased from 26 percent to 21 percent in the latest survey. This was to the benefit of constructivism and the ‘other’ paradigms, which each recorded a followership of 22 percent. The remaining results were realism at 13 percent;

liberalism at 9 percent; the English school at 5 percent; Marxism at 5 percent; and feminism at 4 percent. The low percentages for liberalism and realism, in particular, are intriguing when compared against the responses to Question 41: ‘What percentage of IR literature do you estimate is devoted to each of these paradigms today?’ As an illustration, only 9 percent of scholars in Australia use liberalism as their approach to the study of IR, but the field assumes it comprises 28 percent of all scholarship. Worse, 13 percent identify their research as realist-orientated, but assume it informs 33 percent of all scholarship. Similar discrepancies can be observed internationally and can be explained in one of two ways. First, realism and liberalism still reap the rewards of being the two most dominant paradigms traditionally. This means that it may take time for their decline to become apparent within the field and evident within scholarship. Second, those who subscribe to ‘other’ approaches (for example, green theory, postmodernism or post-structuralism) know their particular paradigm is under-represented in the scholarship, and so they nominate one of the big three paradigms, thus indirectly distorting the results. In the final analysis, the results actually confirm that the ‘vast majority of contemporary published research takes place outside these paradigms...it always has’ (Maliniak *et al.* 2011, 446; see also Sharman and Weaver 2011).

Foreign policy: a pessimistic lot

How the field views the major international issues and problems that confront policy makers was also a subject of the survey. By an overwhelming majority of 76 percent, Australian scholars consider East Asia to be the area of greatest strategic importance facing the country today. This was up from the 63 percent recorded in the 2008 survey and still well above the global average of 34 percent. This increase is due to the fact that they also consider the rising power of China to be the single most important foreign policy issue confronting Australia (see Figure 1).

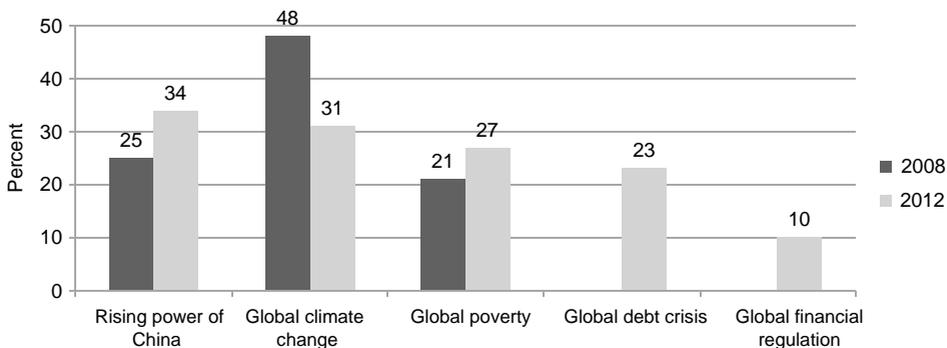


Figure 1. What are the three most important foreign policy issues facing Australia today? (Question 74, 2008 and Question 73, 2012) Note: All numbers are percentages

One side effect of the inclusion of the global debt crisis and global financial regulation is that other long-standing problems such as climate change, oil dependency and resource scarcity have been judged to be less severe this time around, despite no clear progress in resolving them. At the same time, the nomination of the rising power of China as the most important issue should come as little surprise to most. Not only does Australia's economic dependence on China make us uniquely vulnerable, but widespread uncertainty of its intentions as a great power is a cause of deep anxiety (see Dupont 2011; Mahbubani 2008; White 2005). This can be seen in the fact that, along with our New Zealand counterparts, the field in Australia is the most pessimistic of all those surveyed when it comes to avoiding war between the USA and China in the next 10 or 30 years (Questions 76 and 77).

In fact, on an entire range of foreign policy issues, the field in Australia is pessimistic. For example, 52 percent are of the opinion that multilateral trade agreements are bad or very bad for developing countries (compared to 26 percent who say they are good or very good). Only our counterparts in South Africa and the UK are more cynical. In addition, of the 20 countries surveyed, the field here is also the least optimistic (29 percent) about Europe being able to maintain its current membership of the Eurozone (compared to 43 percent globally). On the issue of which actor was best placed to regulate and reform global financial markets, we are more pessimistic than scholars elsewhere that anyone but the Group of Twenty is capable, including the International Monetary Fund, the European Union or the USA. On the fate of our most important ally, the USA, we share the view of the entire discipline that its influence is in a state of relative decline. Perhaps this also explains why Australian IR scholars are so reluctant to support the use of military force by the USA (see Table 2).

At this stage, it is unclear whether such results are predicated on either a distrust in the use of US force, a lack of confidence in its efficacy, or both. In any case, the more important question raised is why Australian IR scholars are generally more pessimistic than their international counterparts across a range of different foreign policy issues. The answer, perhaps, is that it may be a variant of the 'systemic pessimism' that has long characterised Australia's realist outlook (Wesley 2009).

Table 2. 'Would you approve or disapprove of the use of US military forces in the following situations?' (Question 82)

| Situation | Approve (percent) | Disapprove (percent) |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|
| War between North and South Sudan | 23 | 77 |
| If Iran produced a nuclear weapon | 17 | 83 |
| If extremists were poised to take over Pakistan | 41 | 59 |
| To support democratic transition in Syria | 30 | 70 |
| To support democratic transition in Yemen | 24 | 76 |

The profession: achieving independence

A unique aspect of the survey was that it required participants to reflect on their own profession. This included evaluating the quality of Australian universities as options for undergraduate students to study IR. After weighing up the results, the top five institutions are the Australian National University, University of Queensland, University of Sydney, University of Melbourne and Griffith University. Table 3 shows in more detail how these rankings were distributed.

In addition to confirming the position of the Australian National University as the leading university for undergraduate IR studies, the rankings generally conform to those recorded in the 2008 survey. Although the survey did not offer the same question for postgraduate-level studies, one could reasonably expect to see similar results.

Given the controversy in recent years over how research quality should be measured and funded in Australia, the survey was uniquely placed to take the current views of scholars into consideration. The controversy stemmed from the federal government's decision in May 2011 to abandon the Excellence in Research Australia journal rankings, following misuse within some quarters and complaints from the humanities and social sciences that they were not a proper reflection of the fields' own standards (*Australian*, May 30, 2011). In its place, the field has turned to its own subjective judgement and the existing rankings of the Australian Political Studies Association. The global results of the survey established that the five leading journals with the greatest influence on the way scholars think about IR were (in descending order): *International Organization*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Security*, *Foreign Affairs* and the *American Political Science Review*. In Australia, however, the results were somewhat different. While scholars assigned high rankings to the first four journals, the likes of the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science* and the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* were all judged harshly (see Table 4). This is no doubt due to the heavy emphasis each journal places on publishing quantitative-orientated articles and because they rarely publish the work of non-US scholars (see Sharman and Weller 2009). In place of these three journals, which were all highly regarded internationally, the field instead considered the *European Journal of*

Table 3. 'What are the five best universities in Australia for undergraduate students to study IR?' (Question 55) Note: All numbers are percentages (weighted)

| University | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th |
|--------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Australian National University | 42 | 17 | 11 | 1 | 1 |
| University of Queensland | 23 | 21 | 13 | 4 | 5 |
| University of Sydney | 8 | 10 | 12 | 10 | 9 |
| University of Melbourne | 1 | 16 | 21 | 17 | 6 |
| Griffith University | 2 | 6 | 3 | 15 | 10 |

Table 4. 'Rank the four journals that publish articles with the greatest influence on the way IR scholars think about international relations' (Question 47) Note: All numbers are percentages

| Rank | Journal | Australia | Global | USA |
|------|--|-----------|--------|-----|
| 1 | <i>International Organization</i> | 58 | 66 | 71 |
| 2 | <i>International Security</i> | 47 | 42 | 45 |
| 3 | <i>International Studies Quarterly</i> | 39 | 46 | 52 |
| 4 | <i>European Journal of International Relations</i> | 35 | 21 | 12 |
| 5 | <i>Foreign Affairs</i> | 33 | 32 | 32 |
| 6 | <i>International Affairs</i> | 20 | 10 | 4 |
| 7 | <i>Millennium</i> | 19 | 10 | 4 |
| 8 | <i>Review of International Studies</i> | 19 | 12 | 4 |
| 9 | <i>World Politics</i> | 17 | 25 | 28 |
| 10 | <i>Foreign Policy</i> | 15 | 12 | 13 |
| 11 | <i>Survival</i> | 11 | 4 | 2 |
| 12 | <i>Review of International Political Economy</i> | 10 | 7 | 5 |
| 13 | <i>International Relations</i> | 8 | 4 | 2 |
| 14 | <i>American Political Science Review</i> | 7 | 26 | 32 |
| 15 | <i>International Studies Review</i> | 7 | 5 | 6 |
| 16 | Other | 7 | 7 | 5 |
| 17 | <i>Security Studies</i> | 7 | 9 | 10 |
| 18 | <i>Global Governance</i> | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| 19 | <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> | 4 | 11 | 13 |
| 20 | <i>Journal of Conflict Resolution</i> | 4 | 16 | 22 |

International Relations, *International Affairs* and *Millennium* to be more influential journals within IR.

Further evidence of our distinct understanding of the profession is provided by the rankings assigned to the various book publishers in political science and IR research. In the survey, the participants were required to rank the top four publishers according to the influence each had on the way scholars think about IR. On the one hand, we concur with our counterparts by ranking Cambridge University Press (85 percent) and Oxford University Press (55 percent) as the most influential. But we subsequently defy the international consensus by ranking Routledge (47 percent) and Palgrave Macmillan (32 percent) above Cornell University Press (31 percent) and Princeton University Press (28 percent). Indeed, with the possible exception of scholars in Israel, the field in Australia tends to assign influence to a larger mix of publishers than scholars in most other national settings. This is contrasted with the rankings recorded in the USA. Here, the university presses of Cambridge, Princeton, Oxford and Cornell all recorded more than 50 percent, but Routledge could only manage 21 percent as the fifth most influential publisher. The advantage of such a narrow ordering is that it constantly encourages scholars (and students) to strive for the highest standards of research in order to be published by one of the top book publishers. Alternatively, the disadvantage is that it encourages scholars

to neglect a wide variety of university and commercial publishers which may, in fact, be more applicable for their research interests. The field in Australia would therefore be best advised to continue recognising influential research in a variety of book publishers.

In addition to questioning the influence of different publishers, the actual value of publishing research in books (or other outlets) for the advancement of an academic career was assessed. The results in Table 5 clearly show that scholars both in Australia and overseas consider sole-authored books published by a university press and sole-authored articles in peer-reviewed journals to be the gold standard for research output.

As the 2008 TRIP survey highlighted, one of the major differences between the views of the field in Australia and elsewhere is the greater value we assign to publishing a sole-authored book with a commercial publisher. In fact, of the 20 countries surveyed, only New Zealand scholars rank this type of research output more highly. At the same time, we assign far less significance to co-authored, peer-reviewed journal articles than the global norm (23 percent and 37 percent, respectively). Overall, there are strong consistencies across the IR discipline regarding what is and is not a quality publication. One notable result from an Australian perspective was that a policy report was considered a

Table 5. 'Rank the three kinds of research output that it is most important for you to publish in order to advance your academic career' (Question 50) Note: All numbers are percentages

| Research output | Australia | All countries |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Books | | |
| Self-authored/university press | 90 | 86 |
| Self-authored/commercial publisher | 48 | 27 |
| Co-authored/university press | 18 | 19 |
| Co-authored/commercial publisher | 4 | 2 |
| Edited/university press | 6 | 11 |
| Edited/commercial publisher | 3 | 2 |
| Chapter/university press | 13 | 11 |
| Chapter/commercial publisher | <1 | 2 |
| Journals | | |
| Self-authored/peer-reviewed | 86 | 88 |
| Self-authored/not peer-reviewed | <1 | 3 |
| Co-authored/peer-reviewed | 23 | 37 |
| Co-authored/not peer-reviewed | 0 | <1 |
| Miscellaneous | | |
| Own blog post | 0 | <1 |
| Other blog post | 0 | <1 |
| Newspaper article | 3 | 1 |
| Policy report | 0 | 1 |
| Conference paper | 2 | 4 |
| Other | 0 | <1 |

worthless exercise for advancing an academic career. The consequences of this view are analysed more thoroughly in the next section.

Policy: one problem to rule us all

The relationship between the field as a whole and policy makers in Canberra comes under the spotlight, albeit indirectly. Like our counterparts in other national settings, an astonishing 85 percent of Australian IR scholars agree that there should be a 'larger number of links between the academic and policy communities' (Question 59). This should hardly be surprising given that 71.5 percent also say the gap between the two groups is either growing or is the same as it was 20–30 years ago, while the remaining 28.5 percent claim it is shrinking or there is no gap (Question 58). Notwithstanding the ability of a few individual academics to occasionally influence policy, the results highlight the overall political impotency of the field. Even on issues in which there is a broad consensus, such as the importance of China's increasing power, the field is pessimistic that it has the ability to shape foreign policy debates, much less impact national policy. The larger problem, however, is that what we research and how we go about it is structured in such a way that it actually prevents the field from forging a closer relationship with policy makers. This means that in order to increase the influence (and relevance) of the IR community in Canberra, we need to realise that our present approach to research is counterintuitive to that goal.

The true value of the survey was how it exposed this problem. One question, for instance, required the participants to consider how useful various kinds of IR research are to policy makers. In descending order, the field nominated policy analysis, area studies, contemporary case studies, historical case studies, quantitative analysis, theoretical analysis and, finally, formal models. The problem is that this order varies widely with the current priorities of academics. While policy analysis is considered to be the best tool we can offer policy makers, only 17 percent of the field actually employ it as their primary method. Likewise, area studies is listed as the second most useful piece of research, despite only 9 percent describing it as their primary field of study. It should be noted that, within the subfield of political science, 38 percent of academics do, in fact, undertake comparative politics/area studies. But considering only 5 percent of the field actually nominate political science as their primary field of study, this result is somewhat negated. Moreover, only 27 percent of the field cite 'policy relevance/current events' as the main motive for their research (compared to 62 percent for issue area or problem). This was similar to the result showing that only 25 percent of that research is designed with policy applications in mind, compared to 61 percent for the sake of knowledge (Question 31). Fairing considerably better are our counterparts in New Zealand, who achieve a distribution of 44 percent applied research and

50 percent for the sake of knowledge. The one positive to emerge from this result is that the percentage of scholars whose work is primarily applied has improved slightly since the 2008 TRIP survey. Overall, however, these results beg the question of why, as a field, we claim to want a closer relationship with practitioners but willingly limit the scope of our research.

Arguably, the most telling evidence of the problem at hand is the result reported earlier: as a research output, a policy report has basically no value for the advancement of an academic career within Australia. To be fair, this has been set according to the Higher Education Research Data Collection specifications. This does not preclude the possibility, however, that policy papers can gain relevance within policy-making circles, providing there are internal advocates (see, for example, Edwards 2001, 97–134). Further evidence of the extent of the problem is revealed by the fact that only 21 percent of academics have undertaken paid or unpaid consultancy or work for the government in the previous two years (Questions 51 and 52). Even though academics often have limited power to create such employment opportunities, a further 48 percent have also not consulted or worked, either paid or unpaid, in *any* other sector outside of academia. In all fairness, the lack of consultation and work with the government is similar to the results recorded in other national settings. In fact, a careful look at the global results reveals a significant (and possibly unnoticed) problem: a widespread separation of the IR discipline and policy makers. As Table 6 makes obvious, of the 10 countries that participated in the two most recent surveys, only Singapore and Ireland have seen (slight) increases in the number of IR academics consulting or working for their respective governments. In light of these findings, along with the disconnect between IR academics and policy makers in Australia, the conclusion of this article offers a range of recommendations aimed at improving the relationship between the two communities.

Table 6. ‘In the past two years, have you consulted or worked in a paid or unpaid capacity for the government?’ (Questions 50 and 51, 2008; Questions 51 and 52, 2012)

Note: All numbers are percentages

| Country | Paid | | Unpaid | |
|---------------|------|------|--------|------|
| | 2008 | 2012 | 2008 | 2012 |
| USA | 23 | 20 | 14 | 13 |
| UK | 15 | 10 | 18 | 14 |
| Canada | 24 | 23 | 34 | 24 |
| Australia | 25 | 24 | 25 | 18 |
| New Zealand | 41 | 31 | 42 | 15 |
| Ireland | 23 | 17 | 21 | 23 |
| Israel | 20 | 16 | 44 | 28 |
| South Africa | 22 | 17 | 30 | 28 |
| Hong Kong | 33 | 0 | 33 | 13 |
| Singapore | 19 | 27 | 27 | 27 |
| All countries | 23 | 18.5 | 29 | 20.3 |

Conclusion and recommendations

This article analysed the 2012 TRIP survey of IR faculty in 20 countries. From an Australian perspective, there were five key findings. One of these included the strong continuity between what scholars research and what they teach in introductory IR courses. This was clear to see, for instance, in the amount of class time devoted to learning about East Asia, a region being increasingly studied by the field. Another important finding was that the epistemological and methodological gap that has long distinguished Australia from the USA has narrowed on both sides in recent years. Whether this is evidence of a fully formed trend or merely an aberration awaits another TRIP survey. Inexplicably, the survey also indicated that the field in Australia is more pessimistic than most of its international counterparts on a range of foreign policy issues. Australia's realist tradition was tentatively identified as the reason for this apprehension. The fourth finding was that the field is, indeed, capable of formulating its own rankings of the various publishing outputs independently of other national settings. This was evident in the lower rankings applied to many of the leading US journals and higher rankings for commercial book publishers, which are generally considered to be less distinguished than university presses. Finally, it was obvious from the survey that a large majority of Australian IR scholars want a closer relationship with policy makers. At the same time, however, an inspection of the results revealed that the present structure of the field undermines the fulfilment of this goal. As such, the remainder of this article offers some recommendations to help correct this problem.

There is a glaring discrepancy between the large number of IR scholars who want the field to have more influence on policy and the small number who actually conduct research with policy applications in mind. The first explanation for this state of affairs is that, as the TRIP survey revealed, the field generally lacks a primary interest in Australian foreign policy analysis. The second explanation is that the epistemological orientations of some IR scholars eschew policy relevance, such as critical security studies. In any case, a better balance between research that is applied and research for the sake of knowledge is no doubt required. The first recommendation therefore extends on a process already under way in IR departments throughout Australia. Increasingly, universities are disaggregating the roles of teaching and research in a deliberate but delicate attempt to maintain both standards and funding. The suggestion here is to further disaggregate the role of the researcher into two groups: basic and applied. While many departments already have scholars whose research has practical applications, the size and collective influence of this group is clearly insufficient (as judged by the field itself). A corollary to this is the need for scholars to publish non-commissioned policy papers. Given the recent decline in the number of academics undertaking paid or unpaid consultancy or work for the government, the burden now falls on the field to actively promote its research within the policy-making community. The major caveat, however, is that scholars must begin to recognise a policy paper

as a reputable research output for the advancement of an academic career. Failure to do so risks perpetuating the very problem that we apparently seek to resolve.

The second recommendation focuses on the need to make it easier for policy makers to access our research. To do so, this article advocates for the creation of an Australian foreign policy journal based on the model of *Foreign Affairs*. According to the survey, the field here ranks it the fifth most influential journal on the way IR scholars think about IR, and yet we have no equivalent. The key appeal of *Foreign Affairs*, which is published bimonthly, is its ability to promote a dialogue between the academic and policy-making communities through the exchange of ideas. This is partly owing to the fact that it takes articles from a wide variety of experts on US foreign policy and global affairs. In addition, one key difference between *Foreign Affairs* and other IR journals is that the articles are designed to be short and read with ease by both professionals and a broader general audience. It is surprising, then, that there has not been a sustained effort by the field here to create a similar journal. For its part, the *Australian Journal of International Affairs* does not publish (or receive, I suspect) many manuscripts from outside of academia. This makes creating a dialogue extremely difficult. Moreover, while it has an important role to play within the field, the *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, by its own admission, does not ‘seek to promote any particular policies or approaches’. This leaves the field a window of opportunity. A journal modelled on *Foreign Affairs* would enable our research to be shared with government ministries, parliamentary and senate offices, defence and intelligence organisations, non-governmental organisations, think tanks, research institutions and councils, academic departments and the general public. As a start, practitioners will at the very least be compelled to engage with the views of the field.

The final recommendation refers to the need to increase the profile of university research centres and institutions amongst policy makers. For the most part, whatever policy influence the field currently does enjoy comes via the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and the Lowy Institute, neither of which is affiliated with a university. Only occasionally do others, such as the Centre for Middle East Studies at the Australian National University or the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, actively shape policy. This represents a significant problem, but also an opportunity. To some extent, the answer to why the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and the Lowy Institute have been more successful in exerting influence is due to better funding. But this advantage can be negated to some degree through increased specialisation within various research centres and deeper linkages across universities—the same holds true for individual academics. For instance, as many centres and institutions compete to offer influential research on East Asia, other regions still important to Australia’s foreign policy, including Oceania and, to a lesser extent, South Asia, are neglected. As Australia prepares itself for the Asian century, the strategy it will have to adopt, simultaneously, for other regions of the world has by and large been overlooked. Such issues represent promising research strands

for a variety of organisations, considering the proliferation of scholarship already available on East Asia and the role of China. In order to gain more influence in policy-making circles, each research centre and/or institution needs to focus more heavily on distinguishing themselves from the pack.

Note

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