

# The Teacher

## How “International” Are International Relations Syllabi?\*

Alfredo C. Robles, Jr., *Wellesley College*

The acceleration of history may well leave international relations (IR) teachers breathless. It is not just because we have to scramble for maps that indicate in all the colors of the rainbow the freshly minted states with their capitals. Even more important, we are now increasingly dealing in our courses with problems that a previous generation of scholars had consigned to a museum of historical oddities (e.g., nationalism and ethnic conflict in Europe) or problems they did not address (e.g., global warming, population growth, the condition of women).

Are IR teachers equipped to meet the challenges of teaching a discipline whose boundaries have been expanded dramatically by contemporary events, from the reunification of Germany to the Gulf War? I fear that the unique character of IR as an American discipline stands as an obstacle in our way.

### IR as an American Social Science

As Stanley Hoffmann has pointed out, for far too long the study of the international system has been equated with the study of U.S. foreign policy (Hoffmann 1977, 47). As a result, propositions, assumptions, and theories about U.S. behavior have been conferred universal and scientific status. Most devastating of all is the loss of the critical dimension—a commitment to liberation, emancipation, and, where necessary, to subversion of the status quo—among IR specialists, thus crippling their ability to act as agents for change (Krippendorff 1989, 28).

The U.S.-centric focus of the discipline is reflected in the texts that are

assigned to unsuspecting students. K. J. Holsti attempted to verify the existence of an international community of scholars by examining the nationalities of authorities cited in IR texts used in the United States, Britain, Korea, India, France, Canada, Australia, and Japan. In U.S. texts written since the 1970s, references to U.S. authors accounted for more than 80% of all references. It is not even a matter of the well-known ignorance by U.S. scholars of foreign languages, as even references to British authors have been decreasing over time (Holsti 1985, 106). The hegemony of the United States in the discipline also appears in the high percentage of references to U.S. authors in most of the other countries.

We might plausibly argue that this hegemony does not—or should not—prevent authors from examining non-American approaches to problems of concern to the United States or from devoting attention to problems that are not necessarily of central interest to the United States. Notwithstanding the dominance of realism as a paradigm, the American IR community is far from monolithic, and dissenting voices are increasingly heard. Unfortunately, Alker and Biersteker's examination of the reading lists of major IR scholars casts doubt on the ability or willingness of American authors to transcend the confines of realism and behavioralism. Fully 70% of all the items on the lists surveyed were in the behavioralist tradition (as opposed to the pluralist and dialectical approaches); within the behavioralist tradition, 70% of the items were characterized as neo-realist. Alker and Biersteker's conclusion that most leading American instructors of IR theories were

exceedingly parochial are amply justified (Alker and Biersteker 1984, 129).

### APSA's Political Science Course Syllabi Collection

With these considerations in mind, I consulted the “Introduction to IR” volume of the Political Science Course Syllabi Collection edited by Linda Brady, Georgia Tech University, and developed by the APSA, with support from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. From over 80 syllabi submitted by faculty from diverse institutions, 12 were selected. These are the syllabi of Suresht Bald, Willamette University; Richard Clinton, Oregon State University; Raymond Duvall, University of Minnesota; Barbara Welling Hall, Earlham College; Diddy R. M. Hitchins, University of Alaska-Anchorage; Major Jane Holl, United States Military Academy; Janie Leatherman, Macalester College; Kenneth Lieberthal, University of Michigan; Charles Lipson, University of Chicago; Timothy Lomperis, Duke University; Stephen R. Newlin, California State University-Chico; and George Steger, St. Mary College.

The editor rightly points out that each syllabus is remarkable for establishing clear educational objectives, which are then keyed to the readings; for including a variety of learning techniques; and for introducing students to fundamental concepts in IR (Brady 1991, 2-3). These courses also present alternative theoretical perspectives; make theories concrete through historical or other case studies; emphasize the need for students to be informed about contemporary international affairs; and

serve as a vehicle to develop research and/or writing skills (Brady 1991, 11-14). This said, I would nevertheless argue that most of the syllabi are insufficiently "international." The following observations back up my contention that parochialism still holds sway in the teaching of IR.

Although I did not do a statistical count, the syllabi do not depart significantly from the results of Holsti's study. Only Leatherman and Duvall are innovative enough to assign works by non-American authors as major texts (Alvarado 1989 and Barraclough 1967, respectively). This parochialism would not be so harmful if the American authors selected made an effort to do justice to alternative perspectives. As Fred Halliday puts it so cogently, it is the denial of the immense diversity within the American literature that constitutes the real problem with the standard presentations of the discipline (Halliday 1989, 57). Regrettably, very few syllabi represented in the collection escape this charge. The majority of instructors do not just identify realism as a major paradigm, as the editor asserts; realism is the unproblematic and unproblematized framework of international relations analysis. Not surprisingly, the major texts recommended are overwhelmingly realist in inspiration. For instance, Lipson treats problems of international political economy (IPE) from an essentially realist perspective, assigning as principal texts works by Krasner, Gilpin, Vernon, and Lipson himself. Only a handful of teachers are courageous enough to assign a nonrealist work as a major text: Leatherman (Alvarado 1989); Hall (Enloe 1990); Duvall (Jenkins 1987, Enloe 1990).

Dependency, modern-world systems, and other Marxian or neo-Marxian perspectives are either ignored or treated superficially; in the latter case, they are seen through the eyes of their realist critics. Only Duvall divides approximately equal time among four competing theoretical perspectives that he examines (realist, neo-liberal institutionalist, neo-Marxian, and feminist). Only Duvall and Leatherman assign Cynthia Enloe's book *Bananas, Bases and Beaches: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (1990). Very

few require students to read texts by authors from alternative traditions. Only Leatherman, Holl, and Duvall allow the students to have direct access to texts by non-realist authors, the first two by assigning Viotti and Kauppi's reader *International Relations Theory* (1987), and the third by prescribing Rhys Jenkins's book on transnational corporations and uneven development (1987). By and large, the syllabi perpetuate an orthodoxy in thinking about IR and few are truly open to alternative perspectives. This has a direct bearing on the treatment of substantive issues in IR.

Because realism's central focus is conflict, the majority of the syllabi devote most of their time to the traditional issues of IR: national security, East-West relations, and the arms race. The editor argues that many of the syllabi compare and contrast the realist perspective with international political economy (Brady 1991, 12). In fact, of the 12 syllabi, only Lipson, Leatherman, Duvall, Steger, and Holl devote more than just a session or a week to IPE, North-South issues, and environmental problems. One begins to wonder if the teachers of international relations are well prepared to teach students to think about the dilemmas of a post-cold-war period or a "new world order."

I do not deny that the syllabi are all outstanding in their own way. Nevertheless, they raise the question, in one way or another, whether it is possible to teach international relations from a truly international perspective. As I repeatedly tell my students, people living in this country have a particular responsibility to understand different ways of thinking about IR. Assuming, as the title of Joseph Nye's book claims, that the United States is bound to lead, its decisionmakers, scholars, and citizens cannot continue to behave as if "U.S. policy was naturally wise, enlightened, and aware of what was in the best interest not only of Americans but of everyone else as well" (Hoffmann 1989, 271). International cooperation cannot be reduced to U.S. leadership and the acquiescence, obedience, or submission of its partners.

In my own teaching, I consciously address the problem of parochialism.

Being non-American myself, I am more open to works by non-Americans. The text I prescribe for the study of the history of international relations since the post-World War II period is written by a distinguished Norwegian specialist of American foreign policy (Lundestad 1991). One text for fall 1992 gave students a view of IR "from down under," as the author is Australian (Pettmann 1991). Articles come from a wide variety of sources. In the past my students have encountered writings by authors, such as the Egyptians Georges Abi-Saab (1980) and Samir Amin (1977), the Frenchman Pierre Hassner (1990), the Norwegian Ole Wæver (1990), and the Italian Antonio Cassese (1986). Though many are realists (Lundestad, Hassner, Wæver, Cassese), their *weltanschauungen* and interpretations nevertheless differ significantly from those of their American counterparts.

I do not by any means exclude American authors systematically; for a couple of years now, I have relied on Kegley and Wittkopf (1992). But I do make a deliberate effort to choose supplementary texts representative of diverse ideological and theoretical perspectives (e.g., Enloe 1990 for feminism in IR, Brenner 1991 and Chomsky 1991 on the Gulf War). In the past, I have also sought to devote approximately equal time in my theoretical section to each of three different theoretical perspectives—realism, pluralism, and globalism (following Viotti and Kauppi's classification, Viotti and Kauppi 1987). Special attention is also devoted to North-South and environmental issues.

I do not by any means discount the difficulty of putting together a set of readings representative of the most diverse national and theoretical perspectives. This difficulty is compounded by three historical circumstances that leave their mark on the training of the overwhelming majority of today's IR teachers: they were trained in the dominant tradition; they were trained in the United States; and they were trained during the Cold War period. But precisely for these reasons we as teachers should make conscious efforts to overcome our narrow limits. The APSA's Course Syllabi Collection is

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a salutary endeavor that should serve as the starting point for much needed debate on these issues, which we cannot evade for much longer. Otherwise, we IR academics risk sharing the fate of generals who are all too eager to fight the last war.

## Note

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## About the Author

Alfredo C. Robles, Jr. was a visiting assistant professor in the department of political science at Wellesley College during 1992-93. Born and raised in the Philippines, he has lived or studied in France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and the United States. He has just completed a book manuscript on "French Theories of Regulation and Conceptions of the International Division of Labor."

## James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation Announces 1993 Fellows

The James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation of Washington, D.C., announced that it has selected 59 James Madison Fellows for 1993. James Madison Fellowships support the graduate study of American history by aspiring and experienced teachers of American history, American government, and social studies in the nation's secondary schools.

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The 59 James Madison Fellows were selected in competition with applicants from each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the nation's island and trust territories. A fellowship—funded by income from an endowment in the Treasury of the United States and additional private gifts, corporate contributions, and foundation grants—requires that its recipient teach American history or social studies in a secondary school for at least one year for each year of fellowship support. James Madison Fellowships are intended to recruit into teaching people knowledgeable about the origins and development of American constitutional government, to enhance experienced teachers' knowledge of these subjects, and thus to expose the nation's secondary school students to accurate knowledge of the nation's constitutional heritage.

Founded by act of Congress in 1986, the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation is an independent establishment of the executive branch of the federal government. In addition to its fellowship awards, it undertakes other activities relating to secondary education about the Constitution's history.

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