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Sidestepping Interdisciplinary Irrelevance—Current Approaches to Peace & Conflict Graduate Programs

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Beyond the Flying Spaghetti Monster...

- Attending to the basic needs of all humans, such as reflected in the principles delineated in various world charters, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations,
- Promoting what may be termed "common good democratic governments" to protect against the selfish and destructive influence of other forms of government.
- Emphasizing cooperation and kindness over competition, selfishness and aggression.

This code could, theoretically, and perhaps *must* to be effective, take on the power of a religion, to the extent that it must appeal to the majority of humans everywhere on the planet. It must be trusted, respected and adhered to very faithfully under the belief that the very survival of the species depends on it. It must be appreciated as a successful, dependable formula for success, both short-term and long-term for those who adhere to it. It must be a code that humans everywhere and of every religious disposition can accept as sacred.

In summary, if the human species is going to survive indefinitely, it is proposed that it must develop a common

ethic with the power of a great religion. But it must be a meta-religion that holds as its ultimate goal the service of an abstract principle rather than service to a supernatural being. The abstract principle is that the human species is sacred. It is served by promoting the common good. This notion can blend with traditional religions; the common good is referred to by the Christian apostle Paul in his urging citizens to express their individual talents by serving all other humans (1 Corinthians, 12, 7).

The common good can be operationally defined by creating reliable opinion polls of those goals and beliefs that citizens agree will be necessary to sustain the species indefinitely. An example of what such polling will yield is available in poll measures of kindly religious beliefs, human rights endorsement, balanced economics, common good government, and other such dimensions, available from the author. For an introduction, see his book: *Party Time! How you can create common good democracy right now* (<http://amzn.to/1vLcQ8B>). For a copy of the research paper on the I.Q. drop data please contact the author: **Bill@politicalpsychologyresearch.com**.

Member Submissions:

Sidestepping Interdisciplinary Irrelevance—Current Approaches to Peace & Conflict Graduate Programs

Joseph G. Bock & Amanda Guidero

What do you tell a prospective graduate student who asks about job opportunities for interdisciplinary degree holders, such as in International Conflict Management (or other degrees oriented toward peace and justice studies)? First, you make the point that the degree is both academic and practice-oriented. In fact, it can be viewed as a design or applied science—*design* in the sense of architecture, though the artifact is a peace agreement, a policy, a program, or a diplomatic initiative; *applied* in that it seeks to prepare people to solve real-world problems.

Some students want to pursue jobs in the field, working for organizations like the World Bank, the State Department, or an international Non-Governmental Organization. Others want to do research and teach.

But how can these PhD holders get a job in the academy where people verbalize respect for interdisciplinary work while still existing in disciplinary silos? Fitting an interdisciplinary PhD into a disciplinary department is like putting a square peg into a round hole, right? This is a challenge across-the-board in higher education when it comes to the desire to be interdisciplinary vis-à-vis the astounding resilience of medieval organization.

We see three models of PhD programs related to conflict that aim to address this challenge in different ways. First, the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame designed its PhD as a discipline-specific degree. Notre Dame offers PhDs in Anthropology and Peace Studies, History and Peace Studies, Political Science and Peace Studies, Psychology and Peace Studies, Sociology and Peace Studies, and Theology and Peace Studies.

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In contrast, George Mason University offers a PhD in Conflict Resolution without linking it to a discipline, contending that their PhD graduates are prepared to teach, research and practice in the field. In a sense, the George Mason program is built on the proposition that the field stands on its own. It does not need a disciplinary leg to stand on.

There is a third, hybrid model, which has been proposed at Kennesaw State University. It is to continue to offer a PhD in International Conflict Management, but provide students an option of having a disciplinary concentration. She or he will take a threshold of courses within a discipline to earn a concentration within it. As proposed, the student's transcript and diploma will reflect this emphasis, showing something like "Concentration in Economics." This will, it is hoped, be useful when graduates apply for faculty positions in departments of a specific discipline (which is the case more often than not). We also assume it is more likely that our students will be teaching undergraduate courses within the discipline, and publishing in journals respected by that discipline, both of which should enhance their academic job prospects.

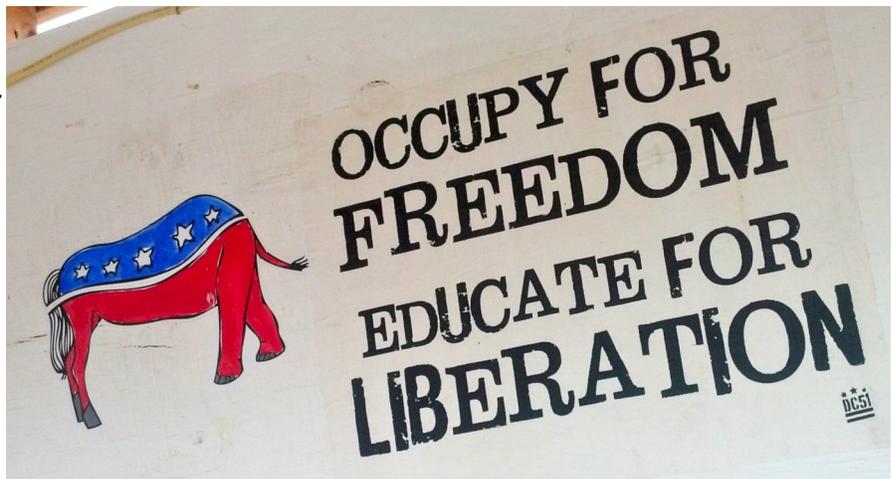
While we propose allowing concentrations in all of the disciplines within our College of Humanities and Social Sciences, we remain unbiased relative to other units of the university. For instance, assume an undergraduate electrical engineering student becomes interested in mediation. Because she takes a course in disaster response, she decides to pursue her MS in Conflict Management. During her master's program, she takes a course on internet-based systems that solicit and compile information from election observers and participants. The information feeds into a digital map, and people are trained in how to prevent election violence. She decides to pursue a PhD in International Conflict Management due to her fascination about systematically preventing violence. She wants to have a specialization in building, not just using, internet-based systems like this. So she takes 18 credit hours in computer science while pursuing her PhD in International Conflict Management. She graduates with "Concentration in Computer Science" on her transcript. Theoretically, for any college or university that needs "science and society" faculty this PhD graduate would be an attractive hire.

robust demand for PhDs in peace studies, conflict resolution or conflict management for faculty to teach in the growing number of peace, justice, and conflict-related master's programs. Such demand could wane, as the momentum for starting new programs starts to slow. This has resulted in the necessity for recipients of interdisciplinary conflict-related PhDs to make themselves marketable to more diverse audiences. One audience is disciplinary departments needing faculty with conflict-related expertise.

Each model has its strengths. Notre Dame Graduates have their relative disciplines at the forefront of their degrees, while George Mason continues to provide a relatively undiluted focus on conflict resolution. The proposed Kennesaw State model, on the other hand, blends the two, preserving the focus on conflict management while preparing students to be competitive in the traditional disciplines, as well. As a proposed model, the question remains: How will traditional disciplines receive graduates of a hybrid program?

This question is not confined to conflict-related programs. Higher education increasingly struggles with the disciplinary center of gravity. Yet modern challenges demand innovative and often interdisciplinary approaches to research and practice.

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The three models presented above provide different approaches to address the same challenge. There has been

(11/2012, Washington, DC, Michael Loadenthal, flickr.com/photos/michaelimage)