

University of Wollongong

Research Online

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts -
Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities

1-1-2016

Curriculum reform: a transformation or consumption model for politics and international relations?

Susan N. Engel

University of Wollongong, sengel@uow.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Law Commons](#)

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Curriculum reform: a transformation or consumption model for politics and international relations?

Abstract

For decades, politics and international relations (PaIR) programs across Australia have taken a smorgasbord or student consumption approach to curriculum development. This article examines whether, with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), there has been a systematisation and transformation of curriculum. It surveys 21 programs and majors in the field offered at 10 universities. It analyses directions in program structure, content and to a lesser extent delivery in order to discover whether there is a shared picture of graduate outcomes. The model of curriculum as a product students' select elements of to consume has largely continued and there has been no disciplinary debate about direction. This may well result in marginalisation if PaIR cannot successfully attract enough new students or influence regulatory debates, which will likely expand given the ongoing massification of higher education in Australia.

Keywords

international, politics, model, relations, consumption, curriculum, transformation, reform

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details

Engel, S. (2016). Curriculum reform: a transformation or consumption model for politics and international relations?. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 51 (3), 555-567.

Curriculum reform: a transformation or consumption model for Politics and International Relations?

Susan Engel, Politics and International Studies, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, University of Wollongong

This is a pre-publication version of Engel, S. (2016). Curriculum reform: a transformation or consumption model for politics and international relations? *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 51 (3), 555-567. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2016.1200708>.

Abstract

For decades, politics and international relations (PaIR) programs across the country have taken a rather smorgasbord or student consumption approach to curriculum development. This article examines whether, with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), there has been a systematisation and transformation of curriculum. It surveys 21 programs and majors in the field offered at 10 universities. It analyses directions in program structure, content and to a lesser extent delivery in order to discover whether there is a shared picture of graduate outcomes. The model of curriculum as a product students' select elements of to consume has largely continued and there has been no disciplinary debate about direction. This may well result in marginalisation if PaIR cannot successfully attract enough new students or influence regulatory debates, which will likely expand given the ongoing massification of higher education in Australia.

Keywords: teaching & learning, curriculum, AQF, politics, international relations

Introduction

Working in a mid-sized politics and international studies program has both its strengths and challenges for academic staff. In terms of challenges, it often means teaching quite generalist curriculum rather than the chance to specialise in one area. In terms of strengths, it can mean opportunities to be involved in the structure and organisation of majors and degree programs at a relatively early stage in an academic's career. That has certainly been my experience: day one at the University of Wollongong (UOW) I became convenor of the Master of International Studies and six years later I was 'Discipline Leader' for Politics and International Studies (yes, seriously we have discipline leaders). Not surprisingly, I have developed a strong interest in understanding how different institutions are approaching curriculum and teaching and learning innovation in the field.

This led me to some systematic research into the directions of undergraduate curriculum development in politics, international relations and international studies (abbreviated to PaIR)¹ in Australian universities.

One of the biggest impetuses for curriculum reform in recent years has been the institutionalisation of the AQF. It reflects views at government level, which have occurred in a range of countries, that existing quality assurance (QA) efforts 'are proving ineffective or inadequate to cope with the changes associated with the massification and globalization of higher education' (Dill and Beerkens 2013: 352). The Framework is a taxonomic approach to designing and accrediting a comprehensive post-secondary school qualifications framework. It consists of ten levels and each of which is defined by learning outcomes that have to be classified as being about knowledge, skills or the application of knowledge and skills. Levels 1-4 equate to technical and further education Certificates I-IV, level 5 is a diploma, 6 is an Advanced Diploma. University qualifications start at level 7 with a Bachelor's degree, 8 is Honours or a Graduate Certificate/Diploma, 9 is a Masters and level 10 is a Doctoral degree. To ensure that degrees meet the relevant AQF level, universities across the country have been developing learning outcomes (LOs) for degrees and majors, ensuring of they have the right level of verb from the Bloom's taxonomy table for the level of learning.² In order to demonstrate the LOs put in place, most teaching programs have specified a set of core subjects that demonstrate student's achievement of the objectives. With all this in place, curriculum mapping occurs. This is where assessment tasks, either in core subjects or in all of the subjects in a program, are mapped against the LOs to demonstrate that they are being achieved. These are often being collected in big unwieldy excel spreadsheets that then disappear into the darkest reaches of university administration buildings seemingly never to return (or so we hope).³

You might surmise a degree of cynicism from this description of the AQF process. The implementation of the AQF and its management by the powerful Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) was a hotly contested issue between the government and universities ultimately producing a 'superregulator' in TEQSA (Vidovich 2012: 253). It has produced increased red tape, new forms of external and upward accountability for universities and it is unlikely to produce the enhanced competitive positioning for our universities in a global knowledge economy

¹ There are, of course, difference between international relations (IR) and international studies (IS) programs, some IS programs do not have their core in IR, for example the University of Technology, Sydney's Bachelor of Arts in International Studies majors are in business, management, communication and legal studies. The degrees included here all have more of a basis in IR though still include other components, such as languages (though interestingly these are not always compulsory). On the debate about what IS is, and why it is or is not a distinct area of study see *Globalizations* 2013 Volume 10, Issues 4 and 6.

² Given that the appropriate verb levels have been the subject of extensive discussion, it is not the focus of this assessment, which focuses instead on the content of learning outcomes.

³ Though for PaIR programs located within accredited programs like business they then feed into the 'assurance of learning' process.

as it was designed to ensure, indeed it is likely to retard risk-taking (Vidovich 2012: 254). Indeed, the capacity of qualification frameworks to drive innovation in tertiary education is questionable. TESQA reflects a global trend toward the creation of new regulatory and QA mechanisms covering both tertiary teaching and research, which have quite significant influence, including on the distribution of resources (Skolnik 2010). The majority of these new systems, as in Australia, are based on direct state regulation and control (Dill and Beerkens 2013). Further, as Skolnik (2010) argues, QA processes are not just technical exercises as they frequently claim to be, but also political ones, which have the power to determine whether academic programs are offered and shape their design. One of the ironies of QA in tertiary institutions in Australia was that these were expanded just as the vocational education sector was deregulated with seemingly little concern for QA.⁴

Nevertheless, some of the ideas about curriculum development that the AQF highlighted are important, in particular the idea that there needs to be structured, cumulative learning through the three or four levels of an undergraduate degree and that there might be core knowledge and skills, even in a field as diverse as politics.⁵ This is an approach that Ann Capling would certainly celebrate as she lamented in 2010 that:

curriculum choices are often driven by academic perceptions of the student popularity of individual subjects, rather than by a more over-arching and systematic process of curriculum design that begins with questions about the knowledge and attributes that should be acquired... (Capling 2010: 479)

Equally, Peter Boyce (2009: 394) noted in relation to IR specifically, the concern that it had become:

somewhat fragmented in some departments, with the growth of fashionable new specialisms... and because of the smorgasbord approach to course structure. Sequential development of units in a degree major had been all but abandoned and electives had proliferated. Fortunately, in most IR programmes ‘theory’ remained a core unit, along with Australian foreign policy.

⁴ This produced some large increases in the costs of vocational education, particularly through private providers, which actually made university qualifications more attractive to some students, thus can be seen as a factor in recent increases in tertiary enrolments.

⁵ The focus on “‘threshold standards” in relation to the achievement of learning outcomes’ reflects global trends in QA (Stowell, Falahee and Woolf 2016: 515). Universities generally prefer ‘resources conceptualisations of quality’, which are an ‘anathema to governments’ focused on budgetary restraint, hence their preference for learning outcomes (Skolnik 2010: 75).

The push for increased enrolments, especially after the end of caps on student places in 2012 and the increased focus on recruiting international students, has encouraged the popularity of student consumption approach (Barnett and Coate 2004: 37-38), which may be countering the AQF focus on structured programs.⁶ In fact, the AQF does have elements of what Barnett and Coate (2004: 28-30) call a curriculum as subject outcomes approach, however overall it promotes a more systematic approach to curriculum. If programs chose, this can be focused toward transformation, meaning student empowerment and outcomes (Barnett and Coate 2004: 35-37).

Capling (2010: 481) recommended we start a conversation about what ‘attributes, capabilities and knowledge’ a politics graduate should possess. That conversation did not take place but the AQF saw universities rapidly develop LOs for programs and majors and new structures linked to those LOs. The implementation framework for the AQF should have factored in more time for discussion and debate about LOs and their systematic implementation. The quite quick turnout time is undoubtedly one important reason for the *post hoc* nature of the response of many programs.⁷ Nevertheless it is vital to understand what directions have been taken in our discipline in response to the AQF and thus this paper examines what progress has been made in the areas that Capling highlighted and well as in areas emphasised by the AQF framework, namely learning outcomes and the role of cores. The areas that Capling highlighted are: foundations, sequencing, research methods, capstones, which are all considered here. Overall the paper highlights that the response to the AQF has been to layer learning outcomes onto existing programs and sequences with little attention to systematic restructuring and that there has been little disciplinary debate, which might have helped give academics responding to these changes more agency to re-shape curriculum.

In terms of the methodology of the article, the data is taken from a survey of the programs of a range of universities using their published websites. The top five Australian universities in the field were selected using the Teaching, Research & International Policy (TRIP) survey as a guide (Morgenbesser 2013). These are: the Australian National University (ANU), University of Queensland (UQ), University of Sydney (USyd), University of Melbourne (UMel) and Griffith University (GU). A selection of other universities was added to provide geographic and size diversity. The additional programs were Deakin University (Deakin), Flinders University (Flinders), La Trobe University (La Trobe), Murdoch University (Murdoch) and the University of Wollongong (UOW). At these 10 institutions, 21 degree programs or majors were surveyed in politics, international relations and international studies. In other words, this is not a comprehensive survey

⁶ One counter-trend to the smorgasbord approach is that, at Wollongong, it was found that quite a significant number of students prefer a more structured program of study quite a few find the range of choices on offer in a traditional Bachelor of Arts degree overwhelming.

⁷ There is also a view that reporting against LOs is just overregulation and an attack on academic freedom. On that debate see (Nygard, Holtham and Courtney 2009).

of Politics, IR and IS programs in Australia, but the number of universities and programs means it is fairly representative. The website survey was undertaken in mid-2014 and repeated in early 2015 to pick up any changes put in place in that year.

The first issue examined is LOs as these are meant to provide the scaffolding for each learning program. Attention then turns to the structure and content core subjects. The final section of the paper explores the topic of capstones before some conclusions about how PaIR programs across on the country, have on the whole, responded to the AQF are offered.

Learning outcomes

Major and degree level LOs are designed to be the framework for each program of learning. The AQF describes them as: ‘a taxonomy of what graduates are expected to know, understand and be able to do as a result of learning. They are expressed in terms of the dimensions of knowledge, skills and the application of knowledge and skills’ (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013: 11).⁸ There is meant to be consistency in graduate outcomes at the different qualification levels regardless of the discipline. This is achieved in part through the volume of learning in equivalent full-time years and generic LOs, like critical thinking and communications skills.

There is very little academic debate in journals or books about learning outcomes in politics or international relations to help frame this discussion.⁹ In terms of benchmarks for LOs, the UK’s subject benchmark statement for PaIR is one source (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2007) and the Australian Political Studies Association (APSA) set threshold LOs for political science though not for IR (Australian Political Studies Association 2011). The UK benchmarks divide the criteria into knowledge and understanding; generic intellectual skills; and personal transferable skills, while APSA just has a single list. Comparing LOs in Australia is further complicated by the fact that many degrees programs also have LOs, so if only the LOs for the major are examined then that will likely be missing generic criteria covered by degree LOs.

Eleven of the programs and majors surveyed were in the politics sub-field, of these, only five universities actually had LOs accessible on their websites and they had between four and eight LOs. I mapped the LOs for these five published programs against the APSA standards, which are a fairly

⁸ This approach was clearly inspired by the Bologna process for creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which began in 1999 and was about creating a comparable degree system for undergraduates and graduates. The EHEA was founded on the idea of qualifications frameworks based on LOs and an overarching framework of qualifications. The process in Australia was driven in part by efforts to ensure mutual recognition of vocational and other qualifications between the states, which goes back to the 1980s.

⁹ There is, however, a substantial literature on learning outcomes at the subject level including on the links between assessment and learning outcomes. The American Political Science Association Teaching and Learning Conferences also have a lively discussion on these themes as it clear from their Conference Track Summaries.

extensive list of eleven criteria covering knowledge, understanding, etc of: the nature of politics, politics systems, key concepts, interpreting political phenomena, research methods, evidence-based arguments, sources, problem-solving, effective communication and ethical and moral standards. The most commonly adopted criteria were knowledge of political systems and critical evaluation of different political phenomenon, which is clear in the Wordle image below.¹⁰ Application of concepts and theories and effective communication skills were also popular (3/5), while evidence based argument and ethical standards were not included anywhere. However, as noted earlier, it may be that outcomes like ethics and communication skills are covered by degree wide LOs.¹¹ The APSA LOs on knowledge of, and capacity for, utilising different research methods only appeared in two of the five programs – the issue of methods is discussed further below in the section on cores. Interestingly, ANU directly adopted four of the 11 APSA LOs (or perhaps vice versa) as its LOs. One other notable divergence was the strong emphasis on workplace skills and readiness at Flinders.

Learning Outcomes from Majors in Politics



Source: Wordle, created by author from published learning outcomes, Feb 2015

Of the 13 programs surveyed in IR and IS, again only five had LOs on their websites though I have LOs for six programs/majors.¹² The number of LOs ranged from four to seven, but three of the programs had six LOs. In this case, I mapped the LOs against each other. The only common theme in the programs was on examining contemporary challenges and either evaluating policy responses

¹⁰ Wordle is a text concordance program that excludes common words and then visually presents them.

¹¹ Or by university-wide graduate qualities and the relationship between these and LOs has not yet been worked out, at least at my institution.

¹² Flinders had LOs for both its major in IR and Bachelor of International Studies. The introduction specified there were 21 programs and majors examined but in looking at LOs, there are 11 listed under politics and a further 13 under IR/IS, this is because two programs were counted twice: UMelb's major in Politics and International Studies and Griffith's Bachelor of Government and International Relations.

or developing policy. This relationship to policy is a significant issue for IR programs, yet I found few subjects directly addressing it. Two programs mentioned sub-fields, Monash claimed that IR has four subfields: security studies, international political economy, foreign policy, global governance. Flinders was a little more circumspect, referring to specialist areas of IR study and naming: foreign policy, theory, international political economy, studies of other countries, and governance structures.

International Relations and International Studies Learning Outcomes



Source: Wordle, created by author from published learning outcomes, Feb 2015

For programs still establishing LOs, the UK standards offer a more systematic, generic approach than that found in the Australian examples. Having said that the UK benchmarks are useful, they are also quite comprehensive and the institutional constraints against the adoption of comprehensive LOs must be noted. The AQF process of mapping subjects and assessments against LOs (developed separately by each university) was very laborious and limiting the number of LOs reduces paperwork.

A consensus about what LOs are ideal for PaIR is not likely achievable as academics in the field hold both different perceptions of learning (Nygaard et al. 2009) and different perceptions of what the key knowledge and skills for graduates in the field are. Further, as UK benchmark report noted about PaIR, ‘[p]erhaps in no other academic discipline are the subject matter and approaches so much in contention and in flux’ (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2007: 4). This was perceived as a positive and the result of the degree of ‘curiosity, free inquiry and debate’ that has and continues to drive research and teaching in the field. However, the lack of a conversation about LOs demonstrates a lack of engagement with not just the pedagogy of teaching politics but

the politics of it.¹³ Further, with the increasing competition for students, we need to have a coherent story about our discipline and be concerned as much about the continued attraction of students to PaIR than about attracting students from neighbouring universities.

The structure and types of cores in PaIR programs

The number of cores in each year of a major varies dramatically in PaIR programs. Programs had everything from just two cores at first year and no others (both at Flinders, which had the highest number of LOs and at USyd, where the cores were two subjects from a choice of four); to one core in each year (1-1-1, UOW politics); to two in first year and one in second and three in third year (2-1-3); and the most were seven in first year, five in second and four in third year (this 7-5-4 was Griffith's Bachelor of Government and IR). There was also quite a range of other combinations in between these. The majority of programs had choices in their core, with the list of choices ranging from two to seven, for example, Deakin's politics major at second year is pick two subjects from seven. I call these 'elective cores'.

From looking at the programs changes and informal discussions with colleagues, structures seem to be based on the whole, more on university decisions about what the core structure would be, or on the practice of 'working with found objects' to meet requirements, rather than through curriculum innovation.¹⁴ The extensive use of elective cores from quite a number of choices confirms this. The main exception to that is Murdoch, where Capling was Provost and she drove systematic curriculum reform and Griffith where the major is in Government and IR, which lends itself to more core subjects than a major in one or the other. Overall, the Bachelor of International Studies degrees examined had more structure, with cores for the degree program, the majors and some compulsory language sequences.¹⁵ UOW and UQ were the only two institutions studies that undertook a reasonably high degree of reform with structures and changes in subjects offered. UMelb had, prior to the requirements of the AQF being clear, moved to the 'Melbourne model,' which saw the adoption of a range of generic skills-based subjects.

¹³ Katrina Lee-Koo's (2015: 381) recent article in this journal on introductory IR textbooks engages briefly in this debate with her argument that standard competencies for IR students are : 'a basic and broad understanding of the history and chronology of IR, a general grasp of the major theoretical traditions, an awareness of key contributing theorists, and a capacity to identify and understand' contemporary IR debates.

¹⁴ This is a term I have borrowed from my colleague Kate Bowles.

¹⁵ The TRIP survey showed that Australian IR/IS academics are one of the most monolingual groups around the world - only just over half can understand another language well enough to do research in it (Morgenbesser 2013: 220). Equally, looking at the Bachelor programs in IR/IS covered by this survey, only a couple had a compulsory language.

The increased use of core subjects appeals to many university administrators who see economies of scale and hence cost-savings in a smaller range of larger subjects. However, the over-use of cores can create its own problems, first the result can be generic subjects, which can be taught by a range of staff but this works against the development of specialist disciplinary knowledge and may produce rather broad, bland subjects. Second, where cores are specialist, they need to be taught every year (sometimes each semester, or trimester), which makes organising staff leave more complex.

In terms of both the structure of majors in PaIR and the actual subjects taught, the relevant AQF requirement is that graduates of a level 7 qualification will possess ‘coherent theoretical and technical knowledge with depth in one or more disciplines...’ (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013: 13). Clearly PaIR programs have very different ideas about how programs should be structured to meet this. In terms of the actual subjects on offer there are some clear common themes but equally a great deal of divergence.

Table 1 groups core subjects in the politics programs studied. Only subjects that appear in more than one program as cores are included. Where a subject was an elective core of one out of two, they are both included (if they appeared more than once) but where the elective core is a choice of three or more, they are not mapped.¹⁶ For degrees or majors that span politics and IR, the main politics units are mapped in this table and the first year IR subject and the rest of the IR components are included in table 2 below. The table only includes university foundation subjects where they were listed in the major sequence (UMelb and Murdoch) and where there was more than one subject in the category. Similar subjects are grouped under headings that reflect content.

Table 1: Politics –Common Core Subjects

Year	Topic	No. universities offering
1	Introduction to Politics (key concepts)	7
1/2	Australian Politics (often an elective core)	8 (6/8 at 1 st year)
1	World Politics/Global Politics or Introduction to International Relations(often an elective core)	6
1/2/3	Power (or Power and ...)	4
1/2	Ideas and thinkers	9 (7/9 at 1 st year)*
2/3	Political Leadership	3
2/3	Methods	4*

¹⁶ This is both for practical reasons – often the list of elective cores are rather long – and for pedagogical ones, once the list of elective cores is more than two, I do not consider them to be effectively cores.

2/3	Public Policy	3
-----	---------------	---

* Note Griffith had a subject in this category in both first and third year, only the first year is counted.

From Table 1, it is clear that there is a strong degree of agreement about the content of a first year politics major – an introduction to key concepts, ideas, thinkers and sometimes institutions in politics;¹⁷ Australian politics, though often as an elective core; and another elective core on global politics. This list is strong on knowledge but more limited in terms of the skills and application needed for a politics major. After first year, there were few subjects that could be categorised together in second and third year offerings.¹⁸ Of the four methods subjects that were cores, two were part of the breadth offerings at UMelb and Murdoch, ANU had a theory and methods subject and UOW has a straight methods subject. Thus, there still is not a great deal of interest in teaching methods in politics in Australia, which likely reflects our preference for qualitative research. However, research methods need to be taught - we are doing our graduates a disservice by not equipping them with at least the capacity to understand and use data and understand and evaluate at a basic level the appropriateness of quantitative and qualitative methods. Further, methods is part of the AQF, which in terms of skills the says Level 7 graduates ‘will have well-developed cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply methods and technologies to: analyse and evaluate information to complete a range of activities’ as well as for problem solving and knowledge transmission (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013: 13).

Table 2 International Relations / International Studies - Common Core Subjects

Year	Topic	No. Subjects
1	Introduction to International Relations: concepts, institutions	8
1	Introduction to International Studies	2 (BIS degrees)
1/2	International Political Economy	4 (2 at 1 st year)
2/3	International Relations Theory	7 (3 at 2 nd year)
2	Evolution or history of international relations	2
2/3	Australian Foreign Policy OR Foreign Policy Analysis	5 (3 on Australia)
2/3	Diplomacy	2
2/3	Research Methods	3 (2 in 2 nd year)

¹⁷ Ghazarian’s (2015) review of Australian politics textbooks demonstrates that the majority of textbooks focus on institutions often linking these to key concepts. The minority approach is to focus on issues.

¹⁸ Though this was based predominately on subject names and a brief glance at descriptions where the name was unclear. A more systematic analysis of subject descriptions using language coding software may produce different results.

1/3	Current Global Issues / World Politics	4 (1 in 1 st year)
-----	--	----------------------------------

There was a similar level of convergence in IR/IS programs at first year as was the case in politics. In this case, it is around: introduction to IR/IS; theory and foreign policy.¹⁹ Four programs had IR theory at third year and three at second year, whereas in politics it was more like to be part of the first year curriculum. The popularity of international political economy was surprising and in contrast, security studies was core in only one program thus did not make the list. Globalisation is rapidly going out of fashion, there were fewer core subjects with the term in the title in 2015 than in 2014, indeed, it has almost disappeared from core subjects. However, current global issues subjects are popular, particularly as third year capstones and these have perhaps replace globalisation.

All PaIR LOs were based around critical thinking and communications skills, for example Flinders' major in politics notes graduates will be able to 'think critically and constructively' and 'communicate in a professional and culturally aware manner through high quality written analytical and oral presentational skills.' Not all universities' LOs specified these skills, but they are core to graduate skills in the discipline and a key part of the AQF. In this regards, the discipline is on solid ground. Yet, PaIR is clearly not doing as well when it comes to issues of methods. There were also a limited number of subjects on ethics or justice in politics programs and even fewer as cores – one exception was UQ's subject called Landmarks of Political Science which examines, among other things, what justice is and who should create a just society. This subject is UQ's politics core (not elective core) capstone, which is on the whole where the most innovation in subjects was found. Thus, while PaIR is not in much agreement about what to teach as capstones, there are some interesting developments in this capstone terrain.

Capstones

Capling (2010) argued that capstone experiences should be part of the curriculum. At the time of her survey, few political sciences programs had made these compulsory. However, the AQF has made them commonplace in Australia and invigorated thinking about what to teach and how to teach them. However, exactly what a capstone is and does, is still a little vague. Van Acker and Bailey (2011: 69) summarises the multiple goals inherent in the capstone idea well:

¹⁹ The content of these subjects would also be interesting to study given Morgenbesser's (2013) conclusions that the focus on standard IR paradigms has increased in introductory IR courses over recent years.

First, they aim to consolidate, extend and apply previous learning... Second, they provide a vehicle for professional socialisation and the development of professional identity to assist students' transition to employment... Third... capstone courses can be used to confirm that students have mastered what are often called "soft" or "employability" skills by the business sector and graduate (or "generic") skills (or "attributes") by academics.

The multiple purposes of capstones are accepted across the literature (see for example Holdsworth, Watty and Davies 2009), which is odd because most existing subjects do not offer both a synthesis of previous learning and employability skills. Indeed, this is a difficult thing to do and, on the whole, meeting these objectives requires two distinct agendas and subjects. Further questions are: what really are employability skills and why should the capstone agenda focuses on these and not on rigorous analysis and scholarship?

Making capstones compulsory also creates challenges, in particular around scale. Teaching innovative subjects with a large cohort is challenging, particularly student-directed learning subjects. If the focus is internships, find meaningful placements for a full cohort of students each year is very difficult if not impossible and extremely time-consuming. Moreover, internships are fundamentally a form of precarious work and there is growing debate about their morality, which as political scientists we should be interested in. Indeed, the very legality of internships is questionable, the *Fair Work Act 2009* only allows them when they are compulsory component of a course and it is advisable they are limited to non-profit organisations and volunteering activities (Stewart and Owens 2013). Equally, university policies around set contact hours, timetabling and workload formulas generally mitigate against innovative approaches to teaching.

Nevertheless, a number of innovative capstones have appeared. The UQ subject Landmarks of Political Science, mentioned above, is interesting topic material though the delivery, from the brief description on the website, appears fairly standard with a focus on 'ten landmark texts of recent political theory.' A perhaps more innovative approach to this topic recently proposed by a colleague in law, Dr Luis Gómez Romero, is to get students to develop their own constitutions for a just society. Other examples include a Parliamentary Project as an elective core at Griffith, where student undertake research topics supervised by both a university and a politician or a 'suitable official'.²⁰ When it works well, this would be a great learning opportunity for students. It is a great capstone for those students that have access to it: it helps prepares students for the workplace, it is inquiry based; and provides a document that they can use in their CV and portfolio; however, it does not necessarily work to consolidate and synthesise a student's degree program, a standard item in the discussion of capstones. LaTrobe's major in Politics has a subject called Doing Politics,

²⁰ Students chose from three options, the Parliamentary Project, a Work Placement or a Student Research Project.

which is available to all and which actually combines synthesis and employability skills. Assessment tasks include producing ‘a piece of written political communication, a short piece of political analysis... a group-based project on political activism’ and oral and visual presentations in class.

These were the most innovative examples on view in the survey and, while there were many interesting topics that could be studied as capstones, delivery and assessments remained quite traditional. For example, the use of simulation-based assessments in cores or electives seems quite limited – at UOW, we think we have the first Model United Nations being taught as a subject in Australia.²¹ This was introduced in 2015 and is a second year core in the major in IR.

Conclusions

The approach to the AQF has varied between PaIR programs in Australian universities, with a majority taking a fairly minimalist approach to it – they have, so far at least, really just adapted their existing offerings to the new requirements and thus continue the students as consumers approach. A couple of programs have taken this as an opportunity for fairly far reaching curriculum reform, in particular, Murdoch University (who were the first university to be evaluated by the TEQSA) and a few others are introducing a moderate level of change. Sydney University announced plans in mid-2015 to undertake university-wide curriculum reform which includes reducing the number of degrees, having more generalist degrees at undergraduate level and increasing their length to four years, changing the classroom experience and introducing more professional skill-building courses and internships. Whether these changes are driven by a transformative view of education is not clear, yet a transformative approach matters for student outcomes and could help to ensure PaIR maintains its attractiveness in this era of continued massification.

The lack of discussions in PaIR in responding to the AQF is, as argued in the introduction to this paper, reflective of the broader lack of discussion of, and collaboration in teaching and learning in PaIR in Australia. The American Political Science Association has a separate conference on teaching and learning (T&L) and most journals publishing on these issues are US-based – *PS Political Science & Politics* and *International Studies Perspectives*, though the British journal *Politics* also has a strong focus on teaching. Even in the US there are calls for increase collaboration as this summary of the challenges from the 2014 American Political Science T&L Conference shows:

²¹ The subject utilises online lecture material licenses creative commons, share alike and thus available for re-use with attribution, see: <http://wikieducator.org/course/MUN/>. It was developed using key literature on the use of simulations, in particular: Asal (2005), Crossley-Frolick (2010), Chasek (2005) and Shaw (2010).

Increased collaboration, across the discipline and departments, is needed to share examples of graduate program curricula, assessment resources, simulation exercises, and innovations for incorporating theories of diversity in the curriculum... Finally, increase focus on collecting good examples of teaching, learning, and research successes so that individuals, and the discipline, can effectively advocate on behalf of political science education (Mealy 2014: 711).

To maintain sanity in these times of increased pressure to teach more, research more and administer more, it is vital to make more of the opportunities for sharing and collaboration that the web offers. This collaboration should also improve the quality, vitality and relevance of PaIR teaching in Australia, which is vital to maintaining our programs in this time of demand-driven places. APSA should consider creating an online space for members to share teaching resources – subject outlines, lectures, tutorial ideas, simulations, games, readings, etc. Contributions should be made under creative commons licence, which would allow use and modification for teaching purposes so long as there is attribution. One proviso that might be appropriate is that members can only remain subscribed to the forum as long as they contribute to it, for example a minimum of one resource per calendar year.

As political scientists, we should also be focused of the political dimensions of QA processes such as the AQF. They can exhibit strong disciplinary biases when dominated by staff from particular areas such as the natural sciences and often disempower individual academics (Skolnik 2010). Disciplinary engagement may help to ensure that the AQF has a transformative agenda for PaIR students, positive impacts for the discipline and that future developments, for example in QA of assessment, are driven by academic concerns rather than managerialism.

Acknowledgements: thanks to Di Kelly, Dan Halvorson, Diane Zetlin and the AJPS reviewers for their comments on drafts of this paper.

References

- Asal, V. 2005. Playing games with international relations. *International Studies Perspective* 6: 359-373.
- Australian Political Studies Association. 2011. Political science discipline standards statement. URL: <<http://www.auspsa.org.au/page/political-science-discipline-standards-statement>> . Consulted 18 February 2015.
- Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013. Australian qualifications framework. Second Edition January. URL: <www.aqf.edu.au>. Consulted 17 May 2016.

- Barnett, R. and K. Coate 2004. *Engaging the curriculum in higher education*. Maidenhead, Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Boyce, P. 2009. International relations. In R. A. W. Rhodes (ed) *The Australian study of politics*. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill, Basingstoke.
- Capling, A. 2010. Professing political science in Australia: The what, how and why of a disciplinary education. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 45: 475-481.
- Chasek, P. S. 2005. Power politics, diplomacy and role playing: Simulating the UN security council's response to terrorism. *International Studies Perspective* 6: 1-19.
- Crossley-Frolick, K. A. 2010. Beyond model UN: Simulating multi-level, multi-actor diplomacy using the Millemmum Development Goals. *International Studies Perspective* 11: 172-183.
- Dill, D. D. and M. Beerkens 2013. Designing the framework conditions for assuring academic standards: Lessons learned about professional, market, and government regulation of academic quality. *Higher Education* 65: 341-357.
- Ghazarian, Z. 2015. Teaching Australian politics. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 50: 591-602.
- Holdsworth, A., K. Watty and M. Davies 2009. Developing capstone experiences. Melbourne, Centre for the Study of Higher Education. URL: <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/resources_teach/curriculum_design/docs/Capstone_Guide_09.pdf>. Consulted 23 February 2015.
- Lee-Koo, K. 2015. Textbooks and the teaching of international relations. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 50: 380-389.
- Mealy, K. A. 2014. 2014 APSA teaching and learning conference and track summaries. *PS: Politics Science & Politics* 47: 711-730.
- Morgenbesser, L. 2013. The 2012 TRIP survey of international relations in Australia: One problem to rule us all. *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 67: 218-233.
- Nygaard, C., C. Holtham and N. Courtney 2009. Learning outcomes - politics, religion or improvement? In C. Nygaard, C. Holtham and N. Courtney (eds) *Improving students' learning outcomes*, Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2007. Subject benchmark statement politics and international relations. Mansfield UK. UR: <www.qaa.ac.uk>. Consulted 17 May 2016.
- Shaw, C. M. 2010. Designing and using simulations and role-play exercises. In R. A. Denmark (ed) *The international studies encyclopedia*, Blackwell Publishing.
- Skolnik, M., L 2010. Quality assurance in higher education as a political process *Higher Education Management and Policy* 22(1): 67-86.
- Stewart, A. and R. Owens 2013. Experience or exploitation? The nature, prevalence and regulation of unpaid work experience, internships and trial periods in Australia. University of Adelaide, Report for the Fair Work Ombudsman, January.
- Stowell, M., M. Falahee and H. Woolf 2016. Academic standards and regulatory frameworks: Necessary compromises? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 41: 515-531.
- van Acker, L. and J. Bailey 2011. Embedding graduate skills in capstone courses. *Asian Social Science* 7. URL: <<http://ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ass/article/view/9412/7133>>. Consulted 17 May 2016.
- Vidovich, L. 2012. 'Transforming Australia's Higher Education System': New Accountability Policies for a Global Era? In H.G. Schuetze, W. Bruneau and G. Grosjean eds. *University Governance and Reform: Policy, Fads, and Experience*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.