

BA International Relations

Public Report

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts

University of Calgary

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Executive Summary

The International Relations (IR) Program is the second largest interdisciplinary undergraduate program in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Calgary. The program offers a unique and flexible undergraduate experience focused on International Relations in its broadest sense.

Students may take a *Bachelor of Arts (BA) in International Relations* on its own, or combine it with a number of degrees in the Faculties of Arts and Science, the Schulich School of Engineering and the Haskayne School of Business. Options also include the *BA in International Relations with Co-operative Education* or a *Concurrent BA in International Relations and Bachelor of Education*.

Created in 1997, the program continues to be popular with students. Our current cohort of over 300 students take a wide range of courses in various disciplines including Political Science, History, Economics, African Studies, Anthropology, Archeology, Canadian Studies, Central and East European Studies, Development Studies, East Asian Studies, Geography, Latin American Studies, Linguistics, Philosophy, Romance Studies, Sociology, South Asian Studies, Religious Studies and the various language programs. Students take a set of required core courses, including a course in statistical methods. In addition to this strong common foundation, students specialize their degree by intensively studying a language other than English, and take courses in one of three thematic clusters (International Political Economy; Security and Strategy; or International Institutions and Governance) and one of six regional clusters (North America; Latin America; Europe; Asian-Pacific; Middle East and North Africa; Africa).

The IR Program offers both breadth and depth within the study of international relations. Students emerge from the program with not only a strong understanding of the field but also a rich interdisciplinary liberal arts education. Further, they also receive training in several areas that are readily transferable to the workplace such as qualitative and quantitative research methods, and critical thinking, written, and oral communication skills. Particularly important for further study in IR or a career in Canada or abroad, is the fact that our students also graduate with a high-intermediate level in reading, writing, and oral communication in a language other than English.

The International Relations program is strongly aligned with both *Interdisciplinarity* and *Internationalization*, two of the Academic Priorities within the University of Calgary's *2012 Academic Plan*. International Relations focuses on cross-border interactions between various groups in the world and how those interactions affect people, states, regions and the global community. The entire program is interdisciplinary and internationally oriented, with students choosing relevant courses from across disciplines and programs within the Faculty of Arts. They do so not only from internationally-focused classes taught by the Faculty's departments, but also from regionally or thematically specific programs such as African Studies or Development Studies.

Student enrichment is an important part of the International Relations program. Students are, therefore, strongly encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to study abroad at overseas

universities or do work placements outside Canada, either through the Co-op program or those offered by the Washington Center Program. In addition, the Department of Political Science supports and provides space for the student International Relations Club (IRC), encouraging students to share their interest in international affairs.

The Academic Plan also encourages that the University “[e]nsure a positive teaching and learning environment on campus” (University of Calgary, 2012: 12-13). Beyond providing study and social space within the Department of Political Science to the IRC for the use of their members, the Department has also ensured that some of our most engaging teachers have taught INTR 301 and the multiple sections of INTR 501. Instructors for the latter have been encouraged to provide a seminar-based class that reflects their own interests and research, aligned to one or more of the thematic or regional clusters within the IR program. Students surveyed within the IR program show a high degree of satisfaction with their development throughout their program, both in acquiring specific knowledge of the subject and in enhancing transferrable skills that have applicability beyond the program.

Finally, the Academic Plan calls to “[r]ecruit talented academic staff members locally, nationally, and internationally” (University of Calgary, 2012: 14). Given that most of the courses that make up the options in the program are mounted by several of the Departments in the Faculty of Arts, students in the program are likely being taught by a range of its strongest permanent faculty.

Context of the Program

The International Relations program is the second largest interdisciplinary program in the Faculty of Arts. The program was previously administered by the Faculty of Social Science from 1997 to 2009 and then the amalgamated Faculty of Arts from 2010 to 2013. Since 2014, the program has been administered by the Department of Political Science. The IR program operates separately, as a parallel program to the Department's own programs. Most of the functions previously performed by the Associate Dean – Interdisciplinarity are now performed by the Head of Political Science, who also selects instructors for the dedicated IR courses. Curriculum decisions and the day-to-day running of the program are conducted by the IR Program Director, currently a tenured member of the Department of Political Science. Student advising is currently split between the IR Program Director, the Department's Undergraduate Advisor, the Department Manager, Ella Wensel, and the Arts Students' Centre. Calendar changes to the IR program are approved through the Department's Undergraduate Committee and then by the Department, as a whole. These originate with the Program Director, in consultation with the Department Head.

With the exception of a small number of named IR courses – INTR 301, INTR 501, and INTR 597 (a directed reading course) – courses in the program are offered by several departments in the Faculty of Arts. This creates a rich academic experience for our students, but it does mean that the program faces challenges not encountered in most degree programs offered by the departments. The first is that the complexity and variety of courses allowed to meet the requirements of the program poses administrative difficulties in providing adequate advice. With an excess of 320 majors, it is not possible for the program director to meet with every student at the start of every semester in a timely fashion to help them choose their courses and offer other program advice.

The second main challenge is the program's dependence on other units, both programmatically and administratively. The programmatic problem is that a Director of International Relations has no control over the courses being offered in other departments or programs, as these decisions are made by Department Chairs/Heads. This has both short-term and long-term consequences. While core (mostly 200 and 300-level courses) are routinely offered every year, and sometimes every semester, the less frequent iterations of upper-year classes makes it sometimes hard for students to fulfill their requirements, most typically in their thematic or regional cluster, in a given year. As a former program director has noted, the IR program is "very sensitive to developments in these other units with respect to personnel and courses: e.g., for seconded personnel to teach program-specific courses, for the offering and timing of courses drawn from these other units, to questions of retirement, course-offering decisions, replacements, leaves, etc. Even matters of learning in a timely manner about Calendar changes, so the [program's] own Calendar entry could be updated appropriately, [can] be a challenge." Another former director added that these problems stem in part from a communications challenge: "Communication between departments and interdisciplinary programs when scheduling course results in

timetabling conflicts that can make it difficult for students to complete requirements and/or complete their program.”

Changes have been made over the years to address these and other challenges. For example, former director Dr. Paul Chastko introduced a new dedicated course, INTR 301, in Fall 2006. The course was intended to achieve multiple objectives: to serve as a gateway that would limit the scope for late entry into IR program, and to provide all students in the program with a common course earlier in their studies both to enhance their sense of being a cohort and to provide a common academic base for the remainder of the students’ courses in the program. In 2008, he altered the requirements for the thematic and regional clusters to provide enhanced rigour, clarity and standardization. Dr. James Keeley, another former director, also emphasised the importance of maintaining goodwill between the IR program and the departments upon which the program depends for courses and resources. He said that he sought to ensure that the program was not seen by departments to be a competitor for resources, so sought to promote complementary interests in hiring requests, for example.

Guiding Questions

The International Relations program last undertook a self-assessment exercise in December 2001. That review was driven, in part, by the rapid growth of the program between 1997 and 2001 (to approximately 200 majors) and a desire to assess the development and future direction of the program. It made a number of recommendations, some of which were implemented, such as a co-op program option and the introduction of a mandatory core 300-level course (INTR 301), and some of which were not, such as an honours degree option.

Since that review, the number of students in the IR program has increased by over 50 percent. Additionally, the program moved from being an interdisciplinary program administered by the Faculty of Social Sciences to an interdisciplinary program administered by the Department of Political Science within the Faculty of Arts, following the 2010 amalgamation of the Faculties of Communication and Culture, Fine Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. As such, there has been significant change since 2001. In light of this, the questions guiding this review are the following:

- How do we believe the IR program operates?
- To what extent is that belief supported by the evidence?
- To what extent does the IR program achieve its objectives?
- Where are the areas of the IR program that could be improved upon?

Understanding that the Curriculum Review process is to be part of an ongoing series of program assessments, the Curriculum Review Team for IR believes that this iteration of the process should be foundational, setting the baseline for subsequent versions of a review of the program. As such, the guiding questions are intended to establish how the program currently exists and where it might develop in the future.

The first two of our guiding questions were intended to identify how we believe that the IR program operates and to identify the extent to which our belief is supported by the evidence. What is clear is that the IR program is designed to offer a program dedicated to providing students with a firm understanding of the various aspects of international relations, from several disciplinary perspectives. Moreover, the program seeks to maximize each student's ability to tailor their program to their own specific interests, within a certain set of program requirements. Students are also expected to develop language and statistical analysis competencies within the program.

The third guiding question for the review was to determine to what extent the IR program is achieving its objectives. To some extent this question is connected to the second guiding question of the review. In general, the IR program does appear to be meeting its goals. The program continues to attract large numbers of students, each of whom take a wide range of courses in various disciplines. To that extent, the program succeeds in offering an interdisciplinary degree that remains appealing to students, and the requirements for which can be fulfilled in multiple

ways. The students themselves believe that their courses offer breadth and depth within IR, and that they emerge from the program with a strong understanding of international relations.

More specifically, part of the curriculum review exercise requires for the identification of specific learning outcomes for the program. Although the curriculum review only mapped a small set of the courses required in the program, the set of core required courses, the exercise nevertheless suggests that these outcomes are largely being achieved through the program's requirements. In part because of the range of courses mapped, the Curriculum Mapping part of the Review largely revealed expected course outcomes that were closely correlated with the level of the classes being assessed.

The curriculum review exercise revealed that teaching and learning activities and assessment methods, at least within the small set of courses that were mapped, were fairly traditional. This in itself is not a concern, as the program has no expectations to offer students innovative teaching practices. The Teaching and Learning Activities and Assessment Methods within the courses mapped showed less variation across levels, and both reflected relatively traditional means of teaching and assessment. The findings on teaching and learning activities were also influenced by the generally large size of the classes mapped, which may have inclined many instructors towards more standard lecture-based delivery approaches. The methods of assessment, in particular, did appear to show a logical progression towards increasing expectations of students' abilities, as they advanced into more advanced courses. There was also no indication in any of the surveys that students regard the teaching approaches or assessment methods within the IR program to be problematic or limiting, even if the mapping exercise suggests less variation than might be desirable in an ideal world.

The data from other sources were relatively consistent in revealing the strengths and challenges of the IR program. The 2014 NSSE survey and Departmental survey of current students reveal that students are relatively happy with the program, and find it both helpful and academically challenging. As the Alberta Graduate Outcomes Survey shows, however, that level of satisfaction is subject to significant fluctuations, correlated to how smoothly the program is working for them. For example, the class of 2011-12 showed a strong decline in the level of student satisfaction which is correlated with a decrease in the time to completion rates and with an increase in the academic rigour of the program, as a result of the 2008 changes. This decline appears to have been temporary, as the Departmental survey shows much happier students again. Limited information regarding the Alberta Graduate Outcomes Survey data makes it difficult to determine how much stock to place in these variations.

The Curriculum Review exercise also revealed areas of the International Relations program that could be improved upon, the fourth of our guiding questions. In spite of the range of potential course offerings to fulfill their requirements, most students found navigating the complexities of the IR program was manageable. However, they sometimes struggled to find applicable courses with which to fulfill their program requirements, particularly their regional and thematic clusters. As the comments of various faculty members show, the challenges here are well understood, but remain difficult to address. Specific upper year courses are often not offered every year by

departments, and it is often not possible for students to know whether a specific class will be offered in the near future. This circumstance limits the ability of students to plan their program on a multi-year basis. An additional part of the difficulty is that relevant courses taught by different departments might be timetabled concurrently, making it impossible for students to register in both, even though both courses are offered. As previous IR directors noted, seeking simply to coordinate course offerings across programs has not proved feasible, largely because of the number of applicable courses that students may take, taught by different departments and programs of the Faculty. Having the IR Director more involved in the Faculty of Arts CARC process might improve awareness of upcoming curriculum changes across the Faculty that will affect the IR program, but that does not address the problem of classes that are “on-the-books”, but not being offered. An alternative remedy to the situation would be to simplify the IR program by reducing the number of courses that are applicable to the program, which would assist efforts to coordinate between different units about the remaining courses. However, to do so would be also to diminish one of the key attributes and attractions of the IR program, that it is possible to fulfill the requirements by pursuing aspects of a broadly-defined cluster that are of particular interest to the individual student. Reducing the number of clusters or each cluster to a generic and more tightly specified version is therefore not a desirable response.

The Departmental surveys of current students suggest that advising is one key issue that is potentially problematic. The diverse nature of the program limits the scope for providing a blueprint of the whole program that would be sufficiently detailed to be useful, but it is possible to provide better guidance to students to take the relevant 200 and 300-level core courses in their first year and second year, respectively, and to reinforce the suggestion that they embark on their language courses early in their program. Doing so would increase students’ flexibility to pursue the later, more individualized, aspects of the program. Such guidance could take the form of a document that is available on the IR website and which is provided to incoming students at the Arts Faculty Orientation.

Students in the IR program have access to program advising online through Degree Navigator, and in person through the Arts Students Centre, the Department Administrator of Political Science, and the Director of the International Relations program. All three are generally available every day, and many IR students do take advantage of these opportunities for advice. Presently, IR program advising is resource-intensive, and draws heavily on the voluntary efforts of the Department Administrator. This is not a viable long-term model for advising within the program. The current version of advising is student-initiated, and often problem-driven. More proactively, the Director could advertise via the IR list that s/he is available to provide program advice at specific times of the week, on a drop-in basis. This is really just better advertising of the status quo: that the Director is available when students want to meet to talk about their program. It would also be straightforward to arrange two more general program advising meetings early in the fall and winter semesters to answer questions from students. Again, these meetings could be advertised via the IR list.

Students also expressed concerns about the lack of information on opportunities post-graduation. The program Director currently passes along, via the IR list, relevant and legitimate

graduate and job opportunities as they are advertised. It is possible to also arrange another general meeting, early in the academic year, at which a representative of the University's Careers Service and the Department's Graduate Program Director discuss where to look for opportunities and how to make an application more attractive to graduate programs or potential employers.

An additional aspect of advising relates to internationalization. Students within the IR program should be encouraged to take greater advantage of the opportunities for internationalization within their program, because it offers means of enriching their degree while fulfilling program requirements, increasing the value of their degree and competitiveness for their future endeavours, and because the University's Academic Plan encourages internationalization. Study Abroad, field schools, and the Washington Center program are all examples of how opportunities for such enrichment already exist within the University and the IR program. However, the information about these is disseminated on an ad hoc basis, so offering a single, more systematic, location for this information might increase student participation in these opportunities. As such, making a list of upcoming field schools, and publicizing the Study Abroad and Washington Center programs, along with links to further sources of information about each, is both easy and helpful.

Finally, students wanted better connections to the Department of Political Science, and to their fellow students. As such, the role of the relevant student groups, the International Relations Club and the Faculty of Arts Student Association (FASA), should be enhanced and promoted through increased Faculty and Departmental encouragement. The Department could also host additional IR-specific events.

Action Plan

Short-term: One year or less

Medium-term: Two to three years

Long-term: Four to five years

Recommendation: Curriculum	Action Items	Timeline for Implementation	Lead Responsibility	Evaluation
Viability of clusters	Monitor the availability of program options, amending the program requirements in the Calendar as appropriate	On-going	IR Director	
	Monitor the viability of specific thematic and regional clusters, amending the program requirements in the Calendar as appropriate			
Curriculum Review	Assess option of having IR Director serve on Faculty of Arts CARC	Short-term	IR Director / Associate Dean	
Internationalization	Provide better information about opportunities for internationalization within the IR program	On-going	IR Director	
Review INTR 301	Review whether INTR 301 serves as a good base for upper year classes in International Relations	Medium Term	IR Director	

Recommendation: Administrative	Action Items	Timeline for Implementation	Lead Responsibility	Evaluation
Program advising	Create document advising on courses that students might take particularly early in their program	Short-term	IR Director	
	Advertise, and hold, weekly drop-in meetings	On-going		

	for program advice with the IR Director			
	Advertise, and hold, more formal meetings on the program early in the fall and winter semesters	On-going		
	Advertise, and hold, a formal meeting on post-program opportunities, early in the fall semester	On-going		
Monitor enrolment, graduation and retention rates	Continuously monitor enrolment, graduation and retention rates to detect concerns early on and, where possible, take appropriate action Student survey should be administered regularly, with some questions targeting issues raised by the curriculum review	On-going	Department Head	
Formalize student survey	Student survey should be administered regularly, with some questions targeting issues raised by the curriculum review	On-going	Department Head	
Teaching by full-time faculty	Ensure INTR courses are taught by full-time faculty, so far as possible	On-going	Department Head	
Timetabling	Review timetabling with a view to minimizing scheduling clashes where possible	On-going	Department Head	
Program governance	Regularize governance of the program		Department Head	