

PANEL 2. Civilian Institution approaches.

What insights can be gained from civilian institutions' approach to strategy and courses bearing on strategy? What should be taught about strategy to graduate students in schools of professional and international affairs/public policy and to undergraduate students? What challenges do you face when teaching strategy and related topics?

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- The goal of the Yale program is to get students out of their academic world to think about practice. It is a single semester, one year class. Spring (theory/historical)-Summer (internship/field)-Fall (applied). Students are mostly undergrad with a handful of professional students and one military. They are team taught, with outside practitioners coming in in the Fall. The Spring is classical, academic seminar setting, team-taught. It is distinguished by using history, the humanities, and humanistic ways of reacting to the world of policy and policy debate. The aim is to form wisdom, action and thought through complex texts and cases. Another is to get academics and practitioners in the same room. There are discussions with practitioners moderated by professors.
 - The curriculum seeks to move students and faculty away from narrower expertise towards bigger, broader questions. In recent years, it has moved to include: classical themes using texts such as Clausewitz and Thucydides; political texts such as Machiavelli and Kant; and social change, activism, and non-violence including abolitionists, Martin Luther King, *Rules for Radicals*, etc.
 - The Carnegie-funded international policy scholars consortium (Stanford, Hopkins, Duke, UVA etc) seeks to bridge the gap between scholars and practitioners. Scholars can teach together as done at Kissinger Center and at MIT. There seem to be four kinds of courses and approaches. 1) What is grand strategy? Does it exist? (cf. excellent TNSR article by [Rebecca Lissner \(2018\) "What is Grand Strategy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield"](#)) Students had no interest in a conceptual, great-books approach. 2) Intellectual history, but this is a little controversial. Students also not interested in this approach. 3) IR theory/ nature of the international system, with its focus on parsimony, generalizability, and external validity. 4) History of USFP but too micro. Arguably, there is relatively little interest in each, especially the first two.
 - At MIT Steinberg and Gavin attempted to take the best and most engaging of each and teach History, Strategy, and Statecraft based on four principles: 1) focus on critical choices (Jay Treaty, Jefferson embargo, War in Iraq, Cuban Missile Crisis.... Stress the notion that choice is involved. DMs facing uncertainty and complexity, with What Kissinger calls 51-49 decisions. 2) levels of analysis/ Waltz' three images. What is the *distribution of power in the international system*, who's the *individual* involved, what's the *nature of the state*. How do these interact? This was their way of avoiding a history/micro approach and IR/ too broad approach. 3) Use primary sources. They used to start with overview texts (Kagan, Mead, etc) but cut them because they overly influenced student thinking. Instead, pushed them to the end of the course and asked students to compare assessments. 4) Give students ownership. Examine critical choices

of the past in contrast with contemporary choices. Apply the same analysis to a problem that they don't know much about.

- A related approach is used at George Mason where the majority of students are government-focused. A series of key questions is asked weekly through case studies. What was the strategy/ did one exist? What was the net assessment? Does the strategy evolve? Did it succeed or fail? Why or why not? Note [Wess Mitchell, Grand Strategy of the Austrian Hapsburgs](#).
- About 30% of the course is on current strategy, including Asia and Russia. [Ashley Tellis' NBR volume](#) has been useful here. A major country is covered each week. What are the assumptions, ends and means of each national strategy? Are they evolving episodically or how? Another week or 10% of the course is on improvisation, ad hocery, incremental strategies, what Gaddis and others call messy strategy. Reality comes through; rigid approaches will fail. Tie-ins are made to business-oriented approaches.
- There is a strong political element here, and leadership matters to many of the successes and failures. Overly rigid approaches seem to fail.
- Other professional schools, including Fletcher, Oxford and the Kennedy School, have student bodies presenting unique challenges and opportunities for curricula and for teaching strategy more broadly. Several elements might be instructive for thinking about how to teach strategy. First, students are from a vast array of backgrounds geographic and otherwise. Their experience and identity matters. Readings have to account for this and be meaningful. Debate and discussion are generally wider-ranging, based on age differences, diversity, and in general identity issues across the classroom population.
- The work experience and future professional goals of students has to be considered as well. Students may be interested in military, business, political, or social strategies; things we take for granted such as victory, or bottom lines, may not be relevant to their goals. If an overwhelming preponderance of the student body is non-U.S. or non-Western, readings and case studies should reflect this.
- A challenge may be conceived of as balancing ignorance and arrogance. There is often ignorance of a topic, but an arrogance that one "knows strategy," often rooted in a belief that having read a part of the "canon" gives one essential insights. Another is that the canon has to be supplemented by other perspectives on power. Another is that domestic politics has to be integrated. Strategy is often thought to be about the balance of power. How did the USSR collapse? Internally. Where is the U.S. weakest now? Internally.
- One course examines, essentially, the roots of strategy. Need to think about this. May or may not be tied to the military. Zero sum competitions for bodies, territory, budgets, etc. But also need to think about cooperation.
- The case study of the Yugoslav wars suits many of these diverse student bodies. Everyone can find something in them, even those too young to have lived through those

years. One exercise is to write an op-ed, or one red-teaming documents possibly from one's government.

Q&A

- One question regarded how civilian institutions decided what to teach. In general there is relative freedom and rapid adjustment compared with PME institutions. The panel was asked how faculty decide what to put in, change, and leave out. The more organized and older programs and PME acknowledge tensions and the need for incremental change. Tradition weighs on some departments' abilities to adapt syllabi.
- It was asked that if strategy is often ad hoc and incremental and messy, when is something NOT a strategy? It was argued that even with the above characteristics, leaders have goals, or should. E.g., Lincoln had goal of preserving the Union. By contrast, there was less of a strategy in various phases of the current Iraq war.
- The question arose as to how to integrate great-man theories. The response was partly that the environment has changed to one that is sprawling, and practitioners need to understand domestic politics and social movements, grassroots activism, etc. AQ should be thought of at least in part as a social movement. Practitioners including the military need to understand the drivers of change and conflict, which are bottom up, human rights, and social. Another answer was to use the *IS* article on Bringing the Statesman Back In.
- The issue was raised as to who has the authority to teach strategy to experienced practitioners. One response was that humility is key, as is a good relationship with students. Another was mastering the material.
- It was asked whether we make enough of a case for why a student interested in studying Strategy should come to Fletcher (for instance)? Alternatives discussed included: 1) Make the J.S. Mill Marketplace-of-ideas argument (we need diversity of perspectives). 2) There are new issues (e.g. nuclear strategy, coin, ethnic conflict, etc) and the way to deal with these requires *non-military* policies and *requires* civilian approaches. 3) Resist the "poopers," 4) there is a niche that civilian defense intellectuals can and must fill. These are complementary.
- The theme of the interplay of strategic behavior and culture and domestic politics was constant. Strategy always entails politics. Thucydides is useful for this — and for examining how society changes during war, civil-military relations, and the role war in society. There was general agreement on the importance of domestic politics to strategy.
- It seems one dividing characteristic is that in civilian academic institutions, students are given theories (e.g. Balance of power/threat; nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear taboos; human rights; democratization) and asked how do these theory translate into policy? At PME institutions, students are given mostly theorists – but not necessarily IR theories – and asked similar questions. Though the commonality is providing something up front to help students think about and evaluate critical strategic choices.

- In at least one view that was not strongly contested, strong, emotional views are not useful in a pedagogical context. There's limited time. The less students know about the case, the better. And encountering primary documents leads to better discussion. Don't want to be totally micro without political context. The best papers are also those they know nothing about, some argued.
- Students like historical cases but must see their value for today. This is somewhat contrary to courses looking at current cases in which students will have had some experience, as in PME institutions examining Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Some civilian institutions use movies and fiction more freely than do the PME.
- There was some discussion about the number of pages students should read. One prof at a civilian institution has reduced page count to give students more time to think about less. The argument is that weekly memo-writing provides the skills students will actually use professionally – so different from producing strategy itself.
- At one civilian institution students read and write memos every week to pull out the core points. This analysis is what most often is required of them professionally--not to production of strategy. The challenges is to develop good case studies to deploy in the classroom. The cases they know least about are most valuable (e.g. Chechnya/Caucasus). Uses movies to set up debates. Too much reading is a challenge.
- There's a tension in the in/out of the canon. Yale Grand Strategy is trying to create a newer broader canon—to avoid thinking in only an American context. Concern whether US-focused texts are broadly applicable? Trying to prevent the study of Grand Strategy from becoming an American history/foreign policy class?
- At civilian institutions, the military students are mature, polished, and better at oral presentations. Less so at writing. They need to be pushed beyond intellectual comfort zones to make broader connections, etc.
- Beware of the dog that doesn't bark — self-restraint/editing. Think about other ways to capture student inputs. Mid-course anonymous critiques. Hold office hours. Use silent writing opportunities. Consider what the Qs that aren't being asked are.
- Writing and publishing on strategy from an interdisciplinary perspective is important, but it can be difficult to know where to publish. There are restrictions and pathologies of disciplines that can restrict young scholars. [TNSR](#) is motivated by this approach. The Bridging the Gap program was also mentioned.
- There may be a greater sense of trust in civilian classrooms. This was raised in the context of whether non-attribution is adhered to strictly, as it is in PME institutions. There was agreement, however, on the need to hone a culture of respect in the classroom. Must be able to talk about anything. norms, identity, religion, etc.

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- There was disagreement on the general acceptance of military students and military perspectives in civilian classrooms, with most believing they were fully accepted and integrated but one prof arguing that there was some ridicule leading to self-censorship, and another that self-censorship is always a problem teachers have to guard against in diverse classrooms, not just among military.