The Ideal Future for Intelligence Education:
Rebuilding and Balancing Practice and Theory

Runner-up, 2012 IAFIE Essay Contest, Graduate Student Category

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The United States Intelligence Community is experiencing rapid growth and an ever-expanding role in preserving national security. For this reason, more emphasis must be placed on educating this nation’s future intelligence officers. The current state of intelligence education does incorporate many positive elements beneficial for the building of an intelligence officer, but there is an imbalance between theory and practice that must be closed. This gap can only be closed with the adoption of a fine-tuned strategy for intelligence education, one that will produce outstanding intelligence officers and enhance the mission of the US Intelligence Community.

Currently, the strategy of intelligence education is centralized around academic resources whether degree programs or case specific courses. Often times these are through certificate programs offered online or in classrooms from academic institutions (Norfolk State University, 2011). Some of these academic institutions are given membership into the US Intelligence Community - Center of Academic Excellence (IC-CAE) program funded by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Through the many IC-CAE universities, students take courses that “develop core skills relevant to the US Intelligence Community” (University of Washington, 2012). These academic courses are the main tool used by many IC-CAE universities. On the other hand they also encourage travel, language emersion, topical lecture attendance, and internships in the US Intelligence Community (Case-Western University, 2012). Therefore, the structured academic component of these programs offers a great deal to intelligence education.

While the current focus on academic courses by most IC-CAE programs and various other institutions do teach some intelligence topics and skills, they alone fall short of their task to provide a strategy for intelligence education. Even though most of these
programs require enrollment in a theoretical course, there is not a dominant guiding
theory for intelligence education. Therefore, there is more practice with little theory and
thus a gap between the two that must be addressed. Furthermore, the practice is too
centralized around academic courses and needs to be expanded. Thus, the gap between
theory and practice needs to be closed and must include more practical experiences for an
ideal future for students in intelligence education.

The ideal future of intelligence education is the idea that students are highly
trained with the relevant skills and analytical framework while being exposed to the
topics at the core of the US Intelligence Community’s mission. This ideal future for
intelligence education can be achieved only with the adoption of a new and organized
strategy, one that is heavily based in practice but entirely rooted in an analytical theory of
International Relations. This strategy utilizes three aspects that will increase the
experience and will train students with the skills and analytical framework needed for the
intelligence field. The skills stressed throughout this strategy are knowledge in effective
data gathering, analysis, and strong oral/written communication. Furthermore, an
appropriate analytical and theoretical framework will provide students with the correct
perspective for understanding and evaluating global events.

The first aspect is that IC-CAE institutions and other institutions teaching
intelligence education must all adopt a certain the academic structure. Second,
intelligence students must participate in workshops and seminars on intelligence topics
that are hosted by the institution. Lastly, there must be a community created for
intelligence students. This strategy will enhance the level of current practice to those of
the ideal future.
Academic Structure

A certain academic structure is vital to the process of creating the ideal future for intelligence education. This academic structure will follow very much in the same tradition of current IC-CAE universities and should result in an academic certificate program. The ideal certificate will require students to take four specific courses as well as demonstrating proficiency in a language, while being open to all major fields as to encourage different perspectives.

The required courses should first and foremost be an advanced International Relations course for two reasons. First, an International Relations course teaches students to analytically think about events between nation states and global actors. Secondly, students must have exposure to this thinking because the theory of International Relations must be the dominant theory of intelligence because it promotes the ideal framework for intelligence.

In the next classes, students must further their analytical training from International Relations by taking two courses that stimulate more critical thinking. The available courses for this requirement must be related to the student’s major field and one of which would preferably be a seminar style class. Lastly, it must be required that the student take a professional writing course to learn how to professionally communicate. By taking these 4 courses, a student will have learned the appropriate theories and analytical framework to research, analyze, and communicate in the US Intelligence Community.

On top of traditional academic courses, students must demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language either through academic courses or a test. Ideally, there should be two
associations with the language. First, students should try to focus on language associated with a specific geographic area that they are academically and personally interested in. This will encourage further knowledge of the area and make a well-rounded intelligence officer. Secondly, it should be encouraged but not required that students study a critical language instead of a world language. Proficiency should be scaled through the State Department scoring system with a 2/2 written/oral score for a world language and a 1/1 score for a hard/critical language. Language skills are vital to the US Intelligence Community and it must be required that students demonstrate proficiency in order to earn an academic certificate.

In addition to the academic course work and language proficiency required for the certificate program, the academic aspect must also incorporate internships. These should not be required but should be highly encouraged because they are so valuable for the training of a future intelligence officer. Therefore, a university’s IC-CAE program must provide resources to help their top students acquire internships. Also, many US Intelligence Community agencies, like the NSA, encourage students from IC-CAE programs to apply for internships because those students have already been trained in intelligence and have demonstrated a desire to work in the US Intelligence Community (National Security Agency, 2011). As internships are great for training future intelligence officers, the IC-CAE program or other intelligence programs must stress their importance and provide resources to help their top students get into the US Intelligence Community. An academic curriculum that offers a certificate and promotes internships must be implemented as a method to academically train students to research, analyze, and communicate for the US Intelligence Community.
This is essentially the same method used by current IC-CAE university programs like the University of South Florida, which has two implications (University of South Florida, 2012). First, there must be continuity between IC-CAEs and other institution’s curricula instead of the current lack of continuity both within and between these institutions. Some IC-CAE’s allow requirement satisfaction in English, Religion, and even Mass Communications courses (Norfolk State University, 2011). It must be stressed that the point of the undergraduate certificate is that students learn the analytical framework and skills for intelligence work, instead of area or subject expertise especially in skills not immediately relevant to the US Intelligence Community. Such expertise should be encouraged for other academic courses but it is not the point of this certificate.

Secondly, as the IC-CAE academic structure provides the best way to train students, membership must be expanded to other universities across the country. This is an investment by the US Intelligence Community, and one that will be highly beneficial as a method to train students much earlier. Yet even with continuity between a larger group of university IC-CAE members, intelligence education must not be limited to the classroom and internships. This is where the second aspect of the ideal future for intelligence education enters and enhances the practice.

**Workshops**

The second feature that must be incorporated alongside the academic courses are workshops and seminars on intelligence topics. At the University of South Florida, where I am the graduate assistant for the IC-CAE program, these workshops are hosted by the IC-CAE and effectively train students how to research/gather data, analyze data, and use written and oral communication to convey ones analysis regarding intelligence topics.
These three skills are crucial to the mission of the US Intelligence Community and therefore must be taught to students that look to become intelligence officers.

These workshops at the University of South Florida are approximately four hours long and begin by giving a topic to students two weeks before the workshop. In this time participants are required to research and gather as much relevant data using any academic, government, or news sources they can uncover and come to conclusions on their findings. This is a great method to train students on information gathering as well as analysis. In the first hour of the workshop, students are divided into small groups where they discuss their conclusions and come to a group consensus. During this time, students further their skills in analysis and communication regarding intelligence topics. In the second hour, the group will promote a spokesperson to give a three minute timed briefing to the invited expert on the group’s conclusions. Soon after the entire group is questioned on their conclusions by the experts on the topic, thus training students to confidently communicate their conclusions about intelligence topics to field experts. During the third hour, a professor instructs a clinic for writing in the US Intelligence Community. In this hour students learn, write, and are given feedback on memos and other writing styles used in the US Intelligence Community. Since these three skills of research, analysis, and communication improve with practice, these workshops continually train and fine-tune a student’s skills. Lastly, the workshop concludes with an hour-long seminar style lecture on the topic by the field expert.

As a participant in these workshops, I have found them to be incredibly valuable even more so than some academic classes. With these workshops, one learns the three vital skills for intelligence and gain subject knowledge with only seven hours of work.
Furthermore, the combination of academic coursework and workshop participation is the most efficient manner to train future intelligence officers because students will be required to use these skill sets in the US Intelligence Community. Also, these skills can be taught in workshops without a security clearance, which would be needed if students were to be trained in HUMINT, SIGNIT, etc. Therefore, it is most efficient for intelligence education institutions to train these skills and let the more specific intelligence education continue to be handled by agencies. Lastly, the academic requirements and especially workshops greatly enhance the practice in intelligence education. It is absolutely imperative that such workshops be offered and required for a certificate by intelligence programs along with an academic course load because workshops efficiently and methodically train students with the skills and framework needed by the US Intelligence Community.

**Student Community**

This academic structure along with intelligence workshops are necessary for intelligence education because they involve more than just classes taken regardless of course material or delivery method. These first two structural aspects of the ideal future are required if a strong intelligence education strategy is to be created nationwide. The idea of nationwide continuity and involvement is the subject of the third feature of the ideal future in intelligence education. For intelligence education to thrive around the country under an IC-CAE academic structure requiring courses and workshops, there must be interaction between programs to the degree of making a community of intelligence education students. This is so vital because it brings together students from across the country to learn to work beside each other before they become this nation’s
intelligence officers.

While a similar effort does exist, where each IC-CAE program’s top two students participate in the National Security Analysis & Intelligence Summer Seminar, the effort to create a stronger community must be expanded upon. To build a community of intelligence students there are a variety of highly valuable options that should all be implemented.

The first effort toward building a student level community must coincide with the three skills and the analytical framework of the academic structure and workshops. The best such way is through the creation of a student intelligence journal. Through such an initiative, students in IC-CAEs and other intelligence education institutions around the country would be paired to research an intelligence topic or geographic region. By doing so, these students will learn the three skills of research, analysis, and communication while also learning to work together on intelligence topics even without being in the same city. Thus, a very effective tool to further the education of future intelligence officers.

The journal itself would provide a diverse perspective on intelligence topics since IC-CAEs and other intelligence programs are located from Washington State to Miami and such a journal would bring together students and programs throughout the country all while promoting intelligence education. Furthermore, students have an incentive in doing this because they will have one more leg up in the competitive selection process into the US Intelligence Community. This student intelligence journal would be an extremely successful initiative, it would expand intelligence education, create a working relationship amongst IC-CAEs and other institutions and their students, and promote intelligence education around the country.
Another such initiative that would help create a broader community of nationwide participation is the SPADE initiative. SPADE is “an online community of subject matter experts who are helping to change the way we approach the discipline of forecasting…” The objective of SPADE is to enhance the accuracy, precision, and timeliness of forecasts for a broad range of events” (The Charles Stark Draper Laboratory, 2011). In this study, participants are asked to provide their insight on topics relating to foreign affairs and then predict the likelihood of an upcoming event. This requires one to research and analyze the topic of discussion, leading to knowledge on a specific global topic and a more expansive understanding of the geo-political world. As a participant in the SPADE initiative, I have learned a great deal and found the experience to be highly beneficial. In the ideal future of intelligence education, students would be required to participate in such initiatives. Also the SPADE program pays roughly $500 a year, ensuring student participation would be more likely. Thus, participation in SPADE or perhaps the development of a similar program for only IC-CAE or intelligence students would be a highly beneficial aspect for intelligence education and help establish a community of students across the country.

Social media is another tool that can be easily exploited for potential benefit to a nationwide community for intelligence education. One such initiative that I have started with a colleague at the University of South Florida is a group on the social media website LinkedIn called the “US Intelligence Community Centers of Academic Excellence” (LinkedIn, 2012). This group is open to students, faculty, and participants associated with IC-CAEs and is a great tool to add to the nationwide community being established.
Lastly, to encourage a national student community the US Intelligence Community should continue their summer seminars but other programs should expand to both national and regional assemblies similar to the previously described workshops. The best example for this type assembly is the Annual Air Force Academy Assembly, where students are invited to attend lectures by USG officials and participate in roundtable discussions on a national security topic. Intelligence education organizations must create these type assemblies at the national and regional level so that students across the country participate in intelligence topic discussions and learn to work alongside a group with diverse perspectives.

**IAFIE**

The creation of a student intelligence journal, participation in SPADE type programs, and more assemblies on intelligence topics will all create a stronger community amongst intelligence education students. These initiatives should be incorporated alongside the IC-CAEs and other institutions to enhance the “practice” side of intelligence education.

The ideal future described here is promising because the International Association of Intelligence Education has the resources to bring this to fruition. Since the academic structure for the ideal future of intelligence education should be the IC-CAE academic curriculum, the International Association for Intelligence Education (IAFIE) can work best within this structure especially with workshops and the mobilization for a national student community. The IAFIE has the resources to host workshops in conjunction with programs by providing the experts and speakers needed to guide the workshops. This will
enhance educational benefit during these workshops, which would be a monumental benefit to intelligence education.

The IAFIE would also be influential in the creation of a national student intelligence community. The student intelligence journal could be created and edited through the IAFIE and the national/regional assemblies would be best in conjunction with the IAFIE. Working with the IC-CAEs and other institutions, the IAFIE would be able to bring in top-level speakers and facilitate the assemblies ensuring that intelligence education was proceeding correctly. The IAFIE helping in these areas would provide a major asset and boost to intelligence education alongside the growing IC-CAE programs and US Intelligence Community.

**Theory**

Closing the gap between theory and practice in intelligence education first requires that the practice is efficient and expanded. Therefore, the recommendations above must be met if there is to be any real movement to close the gap between theory and practice. Currently there is a lack of a dominant theory for the field of intelligence education, and since there is already practice, it has resulted in an imbalance between theory and practice. The closest that intelligence education has to a guiding theory are those of International Relations, which is highlighted by the fact that all IC-CAE programs require students to take some sort of International Relations course (University of South Florida, 2012). However, between realism, liberalism, constructivism, postmodernism etc. there are too many theories of International Relations to simply say the guiding theory of intelligence education is “International Relations theory.” Instead, intelligence education must focus on one theory of International Relations that provides
the analytical framework necessary for intelligence education and critical thinking in the intelligence field. This theory, capable of and guiding intelligence education especially for undergraduate students, must be Realism from International Relations.

Realism in International Relations is the perfect guiding theory for intelligence education because it provides the best analytical framework for critical thinking regarding intelligence topics and the intelligence field. Realism and especially neo-realism, as opposed to other theoretical literature in International Relations, takes a macro approach by studying the structure of the international arena with a focus on either human nature or the capabilities of nation states as driving factor for interactions between international actors (Burchill, 2009). This provides the best theoretical framework because it teaches students to analytically examine how actors influence international events, which is a major component of intelligence. It is also more complimentary to intelligence than its counterpart of liberalism, thus making Realism the best theoretical framework for intelligence education.

The gap between the current and ideal intelligence education theory will be closed through the expansion of an education framed in Realism because a dynamic is created where both theory and practice depend on the other. On the one hand, the practice becomes dependent on the theory because the practice is entirely framed and guided within the theoretical basis. On the other, the theory becomes dependent on the practice because the theory is entirely rooted in the analytical requirements for the practice. This dynamic of dependence balances the importance of both theory and practice, thus in the process closing the gap between theory and practice in intelligence education.

Conclusion
Enhancing the practice of intelligence education by incorporating a rigorous academic structure, requiring workshops, and building a community for intelligence students while basing each aspect in the framework of a strong theory based in the Realism school of International Relations is the ideal future for intelligence education. Through this strategy there will be balance between theory and practice, and both will simultaneously be enhanced for the better of intelligence education. The current state of intelligence education must be refined because it is too disjointed among organizations. This strategy strengthens intelligence education and it provides continuity for each educational organization to successfully train student with same the skills and analytical framework needed to work in the intelligence field. It is imperative that this strategy be implemented because it is the only way for intelligence education to fulfill its objective and train students to become the future leaders of the US Intelligence Community.
References


