

# Student Led Advocacy and the 'Scholars in Prison' Project

Written by William J. Shelling II and Jenny H. Peterson

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## Student Led Advocacy and the 'Scholars in Prison' Project

<https://www.e-ir.info/2021/05/04/student-led-advocacy-and-the-scholars-in-prison-project/>

WILLIAM J. SHELLING II AND JENNY H. PETERSON, MAY 4 2021

**This is an excerpt from *Signature Pedagogies in International Relations*. Get your free download of the book from E-International Relations.**

This chapter explores the interplay between didactic and experiential learning in the context of International Relations (IR) teaching. Using the case study of a course designed around a community partnership with the Scholars at Risk Network (SAR), it examines impacts on student learning as well as instructor delivery. Confirming the benefits of experiential learning in providing experience in a range of professional skills to students, the study also points to the realities of the emotional labor involved in experiential learning. It also reveals how such pedagogical approaches alter the understanding of “expertise” and how this can impact students’ understanding of their role within the discipline. These findings provide important insight into the utility of blending didactic and experiential modes of learning, the learning opportunities and ethics of exposing students to the emotional labor of academic work as well as important reflections on reciprocity when experiential learning takes the form of partnership with external actors.

Although IR is not normally seen as a vocational training program, many of our students go on to have careers in related fields and we hope that much of what they learn in our courses will prepare them for their future professions. With this, experiential learning (EL), which provides students with hands-on experience, or the opportunity to “learn by doing,” is increasingly seen as integral to IR education. Not only do these types of experiences provide students with much desired transferable skills that will help them professionally, but they are also assumed to encourage deeper and/or different forms of learning of disciplinary knowledge(s) that more traditional forms of didactic learning often do not easily facilitate.

Following a brief exploration of the history and use of EL, this chapter will present an example of EL, which was integral to the running of an undergraduate IR seminar at the University of British Columbia. Run in partnership with SAR, this human rights course saw students produce various deliverables on four cases from SAR’s Scholars in Prison Project, which aims to free wrongfully imprisoned scholars around the world. After presenting an overview of how the course ran, including essential inputs from the community partner (SAR), this chapter will explore how a combination of both didactic and experiential learning created unique learning outcomes.

Using survey data<sup>[1]</sup> and author reflections (comprised of both the faculty member who ran the course and a student who took the course), we demonstrate how the types of learning that stem from experiential pedagogies not only provide students with professional development opportunities, but also challenge students to think more critically about core conceptual and theoretical content, the realities of political praxis outside of the discipline, and, finally, what learning looks and feels like in International Relations. The findings from this analysis point to several key conclusions regarding the use of experiential pedagogies that instructors should consider in their course design and that are worthy of further research. These include the impact EL has on teaching faculty (not only on students) in terms of emotional labor, ethical issues regarding the reciprocity in some EL opportunities and the importance of exploring the emergent outcomes when didactic and EL are used in tandem. All of these impacts, explored in detail later in the chapter, can be considered as examples of what Shulman (2005) describes as either “implicit” or “deep structures” in IR as they illustrate both the moral elements of teaching and how students come to attain such forms of

# **Student Led Advocacy and the 'Scholars in Prison' Project**

Written by William J. Shelling II and Jenny H. Peterson

knowledge(s). In other words, emotions, ethics, and being open to emergent outcomes are not simply results of learning, but are central to underlying (and sometimes changing) ethical assumptions about IR and about the realities of how we learn or “come to know” the discipline.

## **Experiential Learning: A Complement to Traditional Didactic Learning**

The goal of experiential-based learning is to integrate and synthesize learning through the application of client-focused or project-based learning (Riefenberg and Long 2017, 580). The majority of such pedagogies are geared towards facilitating student opportunities to make important connections between their academic skills and prior didactic learning to real-world practice (Hauhart and Garage, 2014). These learning opportunities require the ability to succinctly communicate project issues and develop relationships between students and their colleagues (Nordin et al. 2015, 127). Scholars such as Barr and Tagg have noted that collaborative models of teaching where students work with teachers to construct knowledge create strong and meaningful learning environments (Barr and Tagg 1995 as cited in Lantis 1998, 41). This often emulates real-world models of collaboration, meaning that EL often seeks to prepare students for professional life after they graduate.

EL can be contrasted with didactic learning, which focuses on the modes of instruction with which scholars are most familiar in a university classroom—namely instructor-led lectures alongside student discussions of course material and coursework related to the content set by the instructor. This didactic content is generally seen as setting out core concepts and debates related to the discipline. Assignments are largely set for students to showcase a mastery of this canon—generally in the form of research essays or exams (for a discussion of didactic learning and alternatives, see Walks 2015). As an interesting aside, academic disciplines such as nursing, which are often founded on much more experience-based modes of learning, are paradoxically interested in increasing didactic knowledge in their curriculum (Westin, Sundler and Bergland 2015).

With regard to IR, EL has existed alongside didactic learning for several decades. One of the most obvious forms of EL can be seen in the use of simulations, which has roots in Cold War-era classrooms. In these cases, EL has been used as a means of interacting with real-world issues in a controlled classroom setting (Lantis 1998, 39). Simulations of peace negotiations, trade talks, and other global gatherings, such as those related to climate change are also common features within IR classrooms. Experiential pedagogy in IR has also evolved to include internships, field courses, and involvement in faculty research, leading to an increased understanding of political science through application (Kenyon 2017, 98).

As an example, Kenyon describes a work opportunity where students investigated ethical dilemmas and worked in dialogue with development practitioners. These experiences came with unique teaching needs both in terms of pacing and resourcing. They found that, due to the structure of the course and the need for swift communication, smaller classes and teaching assistants were necessary for detailed feedback and assessment of students (Kenyon 2017, 98). Another example from Gammonley et al. (2013) describes a study abroad trip that involved cases concerning human rights violations ranging from gender-based violence to human trafficking. Students were directly involved in policy practice, working to create “global community building and social change” and “exposing them to values about human rights and providing them opportunities to develop practice skills” (619). This experience had ongoing impacts on students’ understanding of their role within international politics, with the authors noting that participants found that they were more compelled to “intervene” in the human rights situations following the study abroad trip (631). Policy advocacy education based on EL, therefore, took on a greater depth and led to more work upon their return to the classroom (621).

In another study, the pedagogical approach of combining in-class learning with collaborative projects regarding leadership and policy demonstrated that students came to understand the subject matter better, and that, alongside this, there was evidence of increasing competencies in policy analysis and other tools used in students’ placements. Students noted that their professional competencies such as written communications, teamwork, and leadership capacity increased following their placement (Sandfort and Gerdes 2017). Indeed, what the above studies observe is that EL is uniquely positioned to teach students far more than content or traditional academic skills, such as critical thinking, research, and writing. It left students feeling more compelled to dig deeper into the subject matter and left

# **Student Led Advocacy and the 'Scholars in Prison' Project**

Written by William J. Shelling II and Jenny H. Peterson

them, in some cases, with a sense of responsibility to act on what they had learned. Further, it equipped them with several transferable skills that would serve them in a broad range of future professions. At the same time, these opportunities created logistical dilemmas that instructors may not have to consider if delivering courses more traditionally, as EL often requires a more responsive, hands-on approach from instructors. These findings guided the initial questions asked and explored the case study at hand and are explored in greater detail in the remainder of the chapter.

## **The SAR Student Advocacy Seminars: Background and UBC Experience**

SAR Student Advocacy Seminars offer a template for experiential human rights learning. Support for running a seminar, or integrating elements of the seminar into already existing courses is provided by SAR staff to professors whose universities are SAR members. The seminars have multiple aims, one of which is having students produce deliverables that support SAR's wider mandates of furthering academic freedom and the human rights work this entails. SAR describes the seminars as an "experiential program [that] is tailored to each institution and group of students and is designed to give students a foundation in Human rights research, standards, and mechanisms; Organizing and advocacy; Persuasive writing; Leadership and teamwork skills" (Scholars at Risk Student Advocacy Seminars n.d.). In this sense, the seminars are based on the important principle of reciprocity, in which both the community partner (SAR) and the student participants gain from collaboration.

At the authors' institution, the University of British Columbia (UBC), the seminar took the form of a for-credit 13-week Political Science course, which met once a week in a three-hour block. It is important to also note that SAR experiences can be integrated as illustrative cases into other already existing courses including but not limited to those on human rights, international politics, legal studies, sociology, or EL programs. Such integration of components of SARs work into other courses and programs is taking root across UBC via a wider teaching and learning initiative that seeks to embed SAR's work within a range of undergraduate courses and programs (UBC, n.d.).

Before engaging in further analysis, it is useful to note the "surface structure" (Shulman 2005), the mechanics of how the course was delivered—this will vary from seminar to seminar, depending on the preferences of individual instructors. At UBC, 22 Political Science and IR students participated in the course. They were split into four groups, with each group being assigned cases from SAR's Scholars in Prison Project. These cases had been selected in consultation with SAR staff based on a range of issues including, but not limited to, cases that SAR deemed as most needing further advocacy work or cases in which the UBC student body may have had a particular interest or expertise. For example, one of the scholars in prison had been imprisoned alongside a UBC Alumni, so there was already a strong circle of advocacy and awareness surrounding this case.

Each week was split into three one-hour blocks. The first hour consisted of a lecture and discussion of academic research related to the topic of transnational human rights. Topics included concepts central to the study of human rights, such as bearing witness, transnational-advocacy networks, human rights treaties and legal mechanisms, and a range of critical perspectives, such as the role of celebrity in the field of human rights. In the second hour, students would often hear from a guest speaker. Staff from SAR would occasionally video-conference with students to provide advice related to the cases. This was supplemented by video-calls from a faculty member that assists SAR in the running of these seminars globally. Additionally, several other individuals also acted as virtual guest speakers throughout the term. These included a "scholar at risk" who had needed to leave their own country and had been provided with a placement at a North American university (as part of SAR's protection work), a close family member of a scholar who had been freed, as well as a close family member of one of the scholars-in-prison who remained detained and whose case students were actively working on. SAR staff assisted in identifying and connecting these latter guests with the instructor. An optional component of the partnership with SAR, these speakers provided incredible insight for students, as they were meeting scholars at risk and those immediately impacted by the human rights abuses they were studying. These were no longer textbook cases, and access to the personal side of international politics had a profound impact on students, both personally and in terms of their scholarship.

The third hour was generally allotted to the experiential component of the course. This is where students worked

## **Student Led Advocacy and the 'Scholars in Prison' Project**

Written by William J. Shelling II and Jenny H. Peterson

towards completing deliverables for the community partner, SAR. These deliverables are ultimately set by the instructor with guidance from SAR and vary depending on the topic of the course and the aims of individual instructors. In the case of the UBC seminar, this primarily took the form of a human rights report (comprised of a biography of the scholar, analysis of domestic and international laws relevant to the case, media monitoring reports, and reports on completed and future advocacy). Students also produced a research poster on their case, which was later presented to the other groups and, in some cases, at a national academic conference. Alongside these deliverables, students also completed more traditional academic assignments utilizing the wider literature on human rights advocacy and non-SAR cases.

### **From Skills Development to Emotional Labor: Impacts of Experiential Learning on Students and Instructors**

To explore the impact on learning that occurs through experiential opportunities, the authors surveyed participants of SAR advocacy seminars globally and included their own auto-ethnographic reflections alongside this. The survey focused on two groups: students and instructors of SAR advocacy seminars. With regard to the student side of the survey, we aimed to explore what they gained and/or learned (broadly speaking) from participating in SAR advocacy seminars. Questions included asking students why they decided to enroll in a SAR student advocacy seminar and what skills they developed as a result of participating. For the instructor arm of the survey, questions focused primarily on why they chose to run SAR advocacy seminars—what learning did they envision would happen within their classrooms and what evidence existed for if and/or how this occurred? Further questions were asked regarding course delivery and their experiences of implementing this form of EL. Some key insights from the data are explored below.

#### *Deepening Disciplinary Knowledge(s) and Understandings of Knowledge Production*

Although the survey was not designed to assess the quality of the seminars, findings did confirm an overall benefit in regard to student learning in SAR seminars from both the student and instructor experiences. What was striking were the noted benefits from both didactic and experiential learning activities within the seminar. Here, it is important to note that a majority of instructors adopted a blended model of didactic and EL. The responses to the survey were overwhelmingly in favor of the benefits of SAR advocacy seminars as a form of didactic and experiential learning—offering students a solid understanding of disciplinary canons whilst also providing students with work experience to complement their theoretical learning.

The most striking statistics lie in comparing the student perspective before and after their participation in the SAR seminars. Respondents wrote that before they participated in the seminar, a majority of them lacked a sound knowledge of the link between academic freedom, human rights, and global politics. Following their participation, an overwhelming majority (90 percent of 43 students) cited that they gained a clearer understanding of these links. What is particularly exciting about this finding in the context of this case and its contribution to signature pedagogies is the foregrounding of academic freedom in this EL opportunity. As instructors, we generally understand the importance of academic freedom insofar as it allows us (in most circumstances) to engage in our teaching and research without fear of repercussions. It is central to our understanding of our role and rights in the academy generally and our disciplines specifically. This is often not the case for students, who are rarely if ever challenged to think about their academic freedom and how it impacts their learning in IR. As signature pedagogies often have as their goal, helping students understand how knowledge is produced and their role within it, an experience that asks them to explore the academic freedoms they have (or in some case do not) and how, in so many cases, academic freedom is under threat, gives students a new appreciation for their studies and how these are undertaken.

#### *Strengthening Student Skills and Employability*

Survey data confirmed that students enrolled in these seminars for a wide variety of reasons. And whilst course design should never rest solely on student preferences, as instructors, it is invaluable to understand the types of learning students are hoping to gain in classes. As junior scholars, they too have a role to play in the shaping of the discipline. Here, the findings are again insightful. Over 46 percent of respondents enrolled because it would expose

## Student Led Advocacy and the 'Scholars in Prison' Project

Written by William J. Shelling II and Jenny H. Peterson

them to the topic of human rights. This suggests that many students are signing up for such experiences not primarily due to an interest in the topic but for other reasons. The survey found that approximately one-third of respondents felt that it would provide them with work or professional experience, alluding to the fact that EL is often seen by students as providing a new means for gaining work experience. As the student-author of this chapter notes in their reflections:

My academic interests before this class focused on human rights as a general topic, rather than specific instances of advocacy. This class was the first experience I had of doing human rights advocacy with an NGO and provided me with a wealth of opportunities to be involved, make mistakes, and execute deliverables. I took this course for the specificity of the coursework, and the interesting course title. It was only after the first class that I found out it was a work experiential-based course that I felt sold on my decision, because of the distinct lack of academic-related professional experiences on my resume. One of the follies of social science degrees is that outside of co-op education or internships, there is a severe deficit when it comes to allowing for work experience in a collaborative setting... I felt that the SAR advocacy seminar allowed me for an opportunity to delve a bit into what NGO work would be like so that I could make more informed decisions on what to do potentially following completion of my undergrad.

Our survey confirmed what the student-author and other studies on EL have found in terms of the valuable transferable/professional skills gained through EL. This is actually somewhat of a challenge to implicit structures in IR pedagogies (Shulman 2005), as the valuing of professional skills leads to a renegotiation of established norms and values within the IR classroom. It challenges scholars to rethink the general reliance on primarily didactic forms of learning, as there is increasing value being placed on experience and political praxis *within academic settings*. Within the survey, data initially suggest students primarily value concrete professional skills (such as advocacy skills, communication, and research skills) insofar as these offer development opportunities that might further their own job prospects. However, what is actually occurring is more profound. Students are coming to value and center skills development and political advocacy within IR education itself.

Worth noting, only a small percentage of students enrolled specifically because they knew about the work of SAR, hinting that the appeal was not based on working specifically with SAR, but rather seeing it as a general work experience opportunity. This finding is also significant in that the top reason for faculty offering SAR student seminars was to increase their university's commitment to SAR's mandate. In one regard, data confirms that these seminars help faculty and universities in this aim, but that so few students knew of SAR's work coming into the seminar suggests that universities and their faculty can be doing more to educate the study body and highlight the aims of SAR on their campus. This finding also raises questions about the ethics of reciprocity in such partnerships that will be explored later.

### *Bringing to the Fore the Emotional Labor of Academic Work*

Over 85 percent of survey respondents agreed that their experience in the SAR advocacy seminars resulted in an increase of empathy within themselves for human rights issues. This aligns with the personal experience of the student-author, who reflects more deeply on this issue:

As a student, I knew very little about the subject matter outside of the typical conversations surrounding "freedom of speech" vs. academic freedom, but thankfully, I gained a stronger understanding of exactly the nuances of this topic. I was extremely curious when it came to understanding the differences between the two, and once I learned that individuals were imprisoned for similar reasons that I gained a stronger empathy for these scholars. The method of learning that we took was not just conceptual, but it was learning more about these individual scholars that we were advocating on behalf of, and gaining something that I didn't expect to learn when it came to NGO work, that you would begin to take this work extremely personally and internalize the struggle that these individuals would face. A significant moment for my group was when we discovered that our Scholar was facing a diagnosis of cancer while in prison, which was a major blow to our morale.

Speaking from the instructor-author point of view on empathy and emotion in the classroom, by the time the course had ended it was clear how (unintended) pedagogies of discomfort (Zembylas and Papamichael 2017) emerged as

## Student Led Advocacy and the 'Scholars in Prison' Project

Written by William J. Shelling II and Jenny H. Peterson

central to student learning. This discomfort in the learning process should not be seen as a negative—often, learning is necessarily uncomfortable. These moments of discomfort appeared as the instructor watched students struggle with what they knew to be true or important through their traditional, didactic learning (exploring academic debates through readings, lectures, and their academic writing) and how this did not always align with what they were experiencing through coursework and their work on their case for SAR specifically. For example, some students were well versed in some of the critiques of human rights work. These accepted academic critiques, however, did not always sit easily in terms of some students' profound personal commitments to the cases on which they were working, where there were unquestionable human rights abuses that needed the care and attention of human rights organizations such as SAR. Students who were skeptical of states' and politicians' commitments to human rights work from their readings and previous learning were at the same time fully committed to raising their cases with state actors and government representatives.

As another example, many students were very much drawn to and appreciated an article the instructor-author assigned on the importance of bearing witness (Kurasawa 2009). Several found the argument convincing and central to both the study and practice of human rights. Multiple students wrote incredibly strong assignments drawing on the importance of bearing witness and the impact it had on several (non-SAR) cases. At the same time, many of these same students expressed to the instructor that, in reference to the scholars on whose cases they were working, bearing witness, was simply "not enough." Frustration and feelings of being ineffectual were common. Watching students sit with and internalize these two competing forms of learning—engaging with valid critiques of the human rights industry alongside working vigilantly for a human rights organization was a striking phenomenon to watch play out as a professor. Their traditional (didactic) learning revealed many truths to them that did not align with the experiential arm of the course.

Why is this important and why highlight student frustration and grappling with uncomfortable paradoxes? Simply put, it is where deep learning occurred. Their didactic learning had taught them one truth, their EL presented them with an alternative truth. These findings clearly illustrate Shulman's (2005) concepts of both implicit and deep structures. These learning experiences forced students to explore deeply held values (both personal and academic), demonstrating and impact on implicit structures within this IR pedagogy. At the same time, there are important findings here in terms of deep structure—how to impart knowledge. Our findings also clearly indicate a difference in traditional (didactic) deep structures of pedagogical learning for IR, as changing the learning outcomes from traditional lecture-based methods resulted in different learning outcomes. Observing these discussions, as a professor, the instructor-author witnessed numerous, unexpected learning outcomes as students unpacked and analyzed these uncomfortable paradoxes in learning. In doing so, it was clear that students were learning lessons about human rights work that neither didactic nor EL could have taught them on their own. Indeed, it was in students dealing with the confrontations of the didactic and the experiential that, from the authors' observations, led to the most meaningful lessons both in terms of content and knowledge production in the discipline. It offered a very concrete experience of the reality that knowledge is deeply contested in the discipline, and there are rarely simple answers to the questions we pose as IR scholars.

### *Challenging Notions of Expertise and Instructor Professional Development*

Whilst the authors of this article began this study primarily interested in these seminars from an IR perspective, our survey instead illustrated the breadth of disciplines integrating SAR seminars into their programming; instructors from the arts, social sciences, and hard sciences have participated in this program. This emphasizes the need for us to also un-silo ourselves and be open to more interdisciplinarity and to expose our students to the realities of how such topics as human rights and academic freedom transcend traditional disciplines. Indeed, an acceptance and integration of interdisciplinarity, with academic freedom as a unifying theme, challenges us to (re)consider disciplinary pedagogical practices (whether they be structural, implicit or deep-seated features of IR).

Beyond highlighting the need for and benefits of interdisciplinarity, other key findings regarding faculty learning emerged from the study. From the survey, instructor experiences seemed overwhelmingly positive, despite some notable challenges to be overcome through their own learning and development. As one respondent noted, "It's been such a privilege and enriching experience, both for me and my students, working with SAR. Advocacy seminars are a

## **Student Led Advocacy and the 'Scholars in Prison' Project**

Written by William J. Shelling II and Jenny H. Peterson

unique opportunity for students to practice human rights advocacy. SAR offers excellent support and guidance to faculty and students.” With this, another instructor noted in the survey, “We do struggle a bit to get the right balance between theory and practice and I still feel less confident in the advocacy work side, but with each iteration of the course (I’ve now taught it 4 times) it gets better.” This highlights the important role that SAR as a community partner provides. Indeed, as previous studies on experiential learning note—these types of learning experiences often require more timely responses, as well as increased human resources, to succeed. The SAR seminar is no exception, and the faculty support and training provided by SAR in these cases cannot be underplayed.

Indeed, the reflections of the instructor-author of this article illustrate the centrality of SAR in the success of this experience (for both instructors and students) and also highlights how experiential learning not only changes classroom dynamics in important ways but often results in profound learning outcomes for the instructor.

As an instructor, I planned and launched the case with much trepidation. Although I had worked with NGOs on experiential learning opportunities for my students on many occasions, working on the theme of “Academic Freedom” and the Scholars in Prison project was an entirely new exercise for me and far outside of my own expertise (peacebuilding policies). Further, recent debates around Academic Freedom related to so-called “Controversial Speakers” on campus have been very divisive and I was worried about managing these conversations with students. My fears were largely unfounded in that the course was oversubscribed and the students were more than willing to engage in debates around academic freedom in ways that were always scholarly, if not difficult and controversial. I was open and honest with my students about where my lack of knowledge and experience existed. We worked through struggles regarding the cases and the advocacy plans together. In many instances, students taught me about potential paths for advocacy and important details of the case. The way that this “flipped” or challenged the “sage on the stage” model of teaching, felt like an important step in helping students recognize their own role in knowledge production and thus their place in the discipline. Experiential learning often means our students are engaged in research experiences that are not documented in the literature.

What the above highlights is how EL often and necessarily destabilizes preconceptions that stem from the prevalence of traditional didactic learning in IR: that instructors will come to the course with all the answers, that they are the experts who have produced and mastered the knowledge that will be imparted to students. EL instead requires instructors to arrive in their classrooms prepared to learn alongside their students. Indeed, our survey found that close to half of these instructors do not consider themselves experts in academic freedom, but confidently took on the running of a seminar on academic freedom, showing a commitment to learn and become experts along the way, alongside students and with the guidance of a community partner. In this sense, EL democratizes and widens notions of who creates knowledge in IR and how it is learned.

### **From “Either/Or” To “Both/And”: The Value of Didactic and Experiential Learning**

Although some seminars focused almost entirely on the experiential element of the SAR program with many positive outcomes, our analysis points to results that stem from a merging of didactic and experiential pedagogies. Importantly, it is argued here that the combination of experiential and didactic learning reveals emergent learning outcomes that were often unexpected, unplanned, and, in some cases, transformative. This leaves instructors hoping to integrate EL with a range of options in terms of what Shulman (2005) refers as “surface” structures—the mechanics of teaching. Each pedagogical tool (didactic or experiential) contributes to different and, at times, complementary learning outcomes. In many instances, lessons learned by both students and faculty members would not have been achieved without the interplay between different modes of learning. This wider finding suggests that future research could explore if or how specific forms of didactic learning are perhaps best suited for the specific forms experiential opportunities that are increasingly part of IR signature pedagogies.

Our findings also suggest the need for further investigation and frank discussions of the emotional labor that stems from EL. In the analysis above, we have largely presented EL as “transformative” and broadly positive—but this is not universally true. The emotional labor of mentoring students through these opportunities as well as the emotional labor of academic work as experienced by students needs more careful consideration. Additionally, the change in deep structures within IR education, how we teach and learn, from traditionally non-advocacy based to being heavily

# Student Led Advocacy and the 'Scholars in Prison' Project

Written by William J. Shelling II and Jenny H. Peterson

advocacy based align with the following questions: How do faculty prepare for this? How do we manage cases when emotional labor becomes overwhelming for students? How do we balance this non-traditional form of learning within IR whilst maintaining traditional standards of academic rigor and what is generally considered the “canon”?

Finally, our findings re-affirm but also problematize the issue of reciprocity when EL takes the form of working with organizations and real-life stakeholders. The discussions above raise the issue of how to ensure ethical engagement in EL opportunities. What discussion do we have with students in relation to this? How do we handle cases where students see such opportunities primarily from a personal gain point of view—an opportunity for career advancement rather than supporting the partner? How do we handle students who, over the term, become disengaged or even disenchanted by the experience, perhaps starting to question the programming of the community partner? How do we handle these situations as instructors who have a responsibility both to student learning and students' academic freedom, but also to the community partner to whom the class has committed to working alongside? These are all questions that are normally not explored when instructors are preparing traditional lecture materials, when instructors are considering how to effectively communicate content. The dilemmas raised above pose further questions as opposed to concrete answers about what is or *should be* the deep structures (how to impart knowledge) within IR. And this is intentional. EL as a signature pedagogy forces us to continually disrupt and (re)imagine the contours of the discipline. Such disruptions are necessary to ensure IR teaching remains dynamic and responsive to the changing state of global affairs.

In conclusion, our analysis, whilst confirming the already cited benefits of EL, has also expanded on these, noting how, in the case of SAR seminars, EL, when combined with didactic learning can very much help challenge and (re)form both the instructor and student understanding of what counts as knowledge and expertise in IR. At the same time, there is more work to be done to explore how exactly didactic and experiential learning can be synergistic. In ending our analysis, for the benefits of EL to be even more fully realized, the authors urge both ourselves as actors, as well as others implementing any form of EL, to pay close attention in addressing both the emotional labor and ethical dilemmas surrounding reciprocity that are also key features of such forms of learning.

## Notes

[1] Behavioural research ethics approval for survey obtained: Certificate UBC BREB H20-02341

## References

- Barr, Robert B., and John Tagg (1995). “From Teaching to Learning A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education.” *Change* 6: 13–25.
- Gammonley, Denise, Karen Smith Rotabi, Janett Forte, and Amanda Martin. 2013. “Beyond Study Abroad: A Human Rights Delegation to Teach Policy Advocacy.” *Journal of Social Work Education* 49: 619–634.
- Keng, Shao-Hsun, Chun-Hung Lin, and Peter F. Orazem. 2017. “Expanding College Access in Taiwan, 1978–2014: Effects on Graduate Quality and Income Inequality.” *Journal of Human Capital* 11, no. 1 (Spring): 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1086/690235>.
- Kenyon, Kristi Heather. 2017. “Bringing the field into the classroom: Methods and experiential learning in the ‘Politics of Development’.” *Learning and Teaching in Politics and International Studies* 37, no. 1: 97–112.
- Kurasawa, Fuyuki. 2009. ‘A Message in a Bottle: Bearing Witness as a Mode of Transnational Practice’ *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26(1).
- Lantis, Jeffrey. 1998. “Simulations and Experiential Learning in the International Relations Classroom.” *International Negotiation* 3, no. 1:39–58.



## Student Led Advocacy and the 'Scholars in Prison' Project

Written by William J. Shelling II and Jenny H. Peterson

- Nordin, Rohaida, Muhamad Sayuti bin Hassan, Rohimi Shapie, Faridah Jalil, Matthew Albert Witbrodt. 2015. "Experiential Learning via Intervention Programme in Teaching and Learning Human Rights Subject." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 6, no. 6 (November): 120–128.
- Riefenberg, Steve, and Sean Long. 2017. "Negotiating the Client-Based Capstone Experience." *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 29, no. 3: 580–588.
- Sandfort, Jodi, and Kevin Gerdes. 2017. "The design, pedagogy and practice of an integrated public affairs leadership course." *Teaching Public Administration* 35, no.1: 50–65
- Shulman, Lee S. 2005 "Signature Pedagogies in the Professions" *Daedalus* 134(3): 42–59.
- Scholars At Risk. n.d. "Student Advocacy Seminars." Accessed September 30th, 2020. <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/student-advocacy-seminars/>
- UBC. n.d. "Scholars at Risk Teaching and Learning Website." Accessed February 28, 2021. <https://scholarsatrisk.ubc.ca/>
- Walks, 2015. *Listening to Teach: Beyond Didactic Pedagogy*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Westin, Sundeler and Berglund, 2015. 'Students' experiences of learning in relation to didactic strategies during the first year of a nursing programme: a qualitative study' *BMC Medical Education* 15(49)
- Zembylas, Michalinos & Elena Papamichael. 2017. 'Pedagogies of discomfort and empathy in multicultural teacher education' *Intercultural Education*, 28(3), 1–19.

---

### About the author:

**William J. Shelling II** is a Master's student at the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia.

**Jenny H. Peterson** is an Associate Professor of Teaching at the Department of Political Science at the University of British Columbia. She is broadly interested in the politics of international aid with her past work analyzing process of liberal peacebuilding and critiques thereof. Finding much of this critical work homogenizing of a diverse range of processes she has recently begun exploring conceptual and empirical deviations from the liberal model. Engaging with debates on agonism, resistance, hybridity, and political space she is now exploring diversity and innovation, both local and international, in peace/justice movements. She has conducted research and led student fieldtrips in Kosovo, Sri Lanka, and Ghana. Her teaching interests include International Relations, comparative politics, humanitarian studies, and peace studies. Based in Political Science, she will also be teaching at UBC's new Vantage College.