

UN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

**UN Studies:
Foundations for an
Emerging Field of Study**

Kirsten Haack
Julia Harfensteller
Henrike Paepcke

Discussion Paper No 1

THE AUTHORS

Kirsten Haack is Associate Lecturer on the Open University's MSc in Development Management program and Learning Enhancement Coordinator at the Glasgow School of Art.

Julia Harfensteller is a PhD Candidate at the University of Bremen and Co-Chair of the UN Studies Association.

Henrike Paepcke is Senior Fellow of the Düsseldorf Institute for Foreign and Security Policy, Co-Chair of the UN Studies Association and Consultant for small businesses and NGOs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	4
Introduction	5
Shortcomings of UN teaching and research	7
Teaching.....	7
Research.....	10
Challenges for the next generation	14
Academic initiatives paving the way towards UN Studies	16
Conceptualising UN Studies	20
Key principles for a future field of studies	20
Interdisciplinarity as a key feature of UN Studies.....	21
Key issues and research questions of future UN Studies	24
The UN Studies curriculum for the 21st century.....	26
New technologies and the future UN generation	29
Conclusion	31

SUMMARY

In this first discussion paper by the UN Studies Association we critically review current UN research and teaching, and offer a vision for a new field of studies: UN Studies. We claim that new research and education conventions, structures and contents need to be developed that place the UN - and not subject disciplines (e.g. international law, politics, international relations, organizational sociology) - at the center of inquiry. Consequently, we argue that it is timely and necessary to conceptualize "UN Studies" as a stand-alone field of interdisciplinary studies about the UN. This article proposes a creative common of UN Studies, demonstrating why an integrated field of studies is needed, and defining core features and methods of teaching.

INTRODUCTION

A glance at the last two decades of academic UN research and teaching reveals that the end of the Cold War not only constituted a strong incentive for activities by the world institution itself, but also for academic research and teaching about it. Trying to keep track of institutional changes and the UN's ever growing complexity, scholarly literature has increased and diversified by taking on interdisciplinary approaches. This process may presage an emerging field of studies around the UN: UN Studies. However, important preconditions for the evolution of a new discipline or field of studies are missing: an institutional body in a material sense, built by academic institutes and including teaching curricula, techniques as well as resources; furthermore, an institutional body in an ideational sense, consisting of a common identity and a creative common.

Founded in 2007 by academics and UN practitioners to enhance and promote UN research and teaching, the UN Studies Association has been engaged in developing new approaches, methods and tools in research and teaching about the UN (www.unstudies.org). As members of the Association we argue that the UN is key in meeting the new challenges of the 21st century. As one of the most complex social organizations in the world, it features a wide range of qualities that are indispensable and unmatched by any other organization on the regional or international level.¹ With its unique legitimacy, universal representation and a high level of credibility (even within the US), the UN plays a key role in multilateral decision-making and excels in development, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and other activities, offering extensive practical experience, expertise and last but not least, successes.

First, we will critically reflect on current UN research and teaching under the following aspects:

¹ For a debate about the unique characteristics of the UN see: Patricia Goff and Paul Heinbecker, eds., *Irrelevant or Indispensable? The United Nations in the 21st Century* (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2005).

- What are the main problems of UN teaching and research today?
- Are the above mentioned qualities of the UN adequately addressed in research and teaching, given the predominance of disciplinary boundaries and state-centric views?
- What are the wider implications and main trends? What are the latest initiatives in UN research and teaching? Do traditional perspectives, approaches and methods, even if specifically applied to the UN, provide the necessary answers to complex problems? What should UN research and teaching look like instead?

Secondly, we will locate and define UN Studies, and fill this concept with life. This endeavor is by no means trivial, as current UN research is mainly characterized by its fuzzy boundaries and the lack of a real core. In detail, we will address the issue of defining the field of UN Studies, its shape, core and boundaries:

- What are the main challenges and opportunities of UN teaching and research?
- How do we envision future UN Studies? What are its key principles and features?
- How to better engage the younger generation in their key roles as drivers of social change and front-runners of the digital revolution?

Shortcomings of UN teaching and research

TEACHING

The attempt to analyze how the UN is taught today raises a number of questions, most obviously the question of content, i.e. why certain topics are included or excluded, and which textbooks are used. However, to gain a full picture of how the UN is taught today, we need to understand how students learn and how they study the UN. We need to ask what our teaching of the UN tells students about the field of study, its traditions, its future and its own self-image. Most importantly, we need to ask whether the way in which the subject is taught achieves the goals of higher education learning. Indeed, we show that the structure of UN Studies as a field of study and the knowledge embodied in this (barely existing) field fundamentally affects the nature and outcome of learning, and it does so in a way no longer congruent with the goals of higher education in the 21st century.

One would be forgiven to think that UN teaching would be part of any curriculum in the wider political sciences. Yet, UN Studies is neither an established part of the International Relations curriculum, nor is it clearly defined. Instead, UN teaching is 'buried' in a variety of related topics and programs, forcing students interested in studying the UN to choose from more general courses in International Relations and International Law, or more specialized courses such as Global Governance and International Organizations. These courses draw on the UN to explain how international organizations have developed historically, to compare a variety of international organizations or to analyze issues such as peacekeeping and development aid. Progression across the curriculum is rarely provided. Consequently, students who wish to learn about or indeed specialize in UN Studies, do so without the infrastructure of dedicated learning, teaching and research centers.²

² For example, in the UK out of 71 universities offering degrees in International Politics, International Relations or International Studies, only nine provide courses specifically focusing on the UN and 35 courses are offered on International Organizations and Global Governance. Of these 46 universities only three offer more than one course from the broader spectrum of UN Studies, IO

Consequently, learning takes place within traditional disciplinary frameworks, each with its own ontology, language, theoretical approaches and methodological toolkits. The existing standard UN Studies curriculum therefore does not facilitate a holistic picture of the organization as a multidimensional institution. Relying on specific and partial theoretical models and methodological practices generates scattered islands of knowledge and provokes a highly inconsistent notion of what the UN *is* or *does*, framing specific and often biased views of the organization as 'the UN as an instrument of member states' and 'the UN as tiger without teeth'. These conclusions originate from and foment a neo-realist narrative on the UN as an 'ineffective and inefficient organization.'

The boundaries of UN Studies are fuzzy and its core underdefined. Where UN Studies is taught as a subject itself (rare it may be),³ the subject appears to the student as either too broad or too narrow, i.e. as either global politics from the perspective of one institution (multilateralism) or as a detailed description of institutional set-ups and regulations of individual bodies. As a result, courses are often organized around a list of topics which we call here the "standard UN curriculum." This list typically includes theories of cooperation, the history of liberal internationalism and the history of the creation of the UN. This is followed by an analysis of the key UN bodies (in particular the Security Council), an overview over the three main policy areas (peace, development, human rights) and, finally, UN reform. Textbooks further support and indeed entrench these 'traditional' foci as Kille's analysis of International Organizations textbooks showed.⁴

This lack of definition of the field of UN Studies therefore not only impacts on its place in the wider political science curriculum, but also on the quality of learning. Twenty-first century higher education aims to move beyond simple recall to achieve 'deep' i.e. qualitative learning. This requires the ability to synthesize, and evaluate information, to relate and apply and, most importantly, to abstract knowledge.⁵ The standard UN Studies curriculum in many ways does not support the achievement of deep learning as the subject and its learning materials remain largely descriptive and list-like.

Studies or Global Governance at undergraduate level, while four offer one course at undergraduate and postgraduate level; see UCAS *Universities and College Admissions Service. Course search 2008*, <http://wwwucas.ac.uk>.

³ See an overview of UN studies programs as compiled by UN Studies Association members at <http://www.unstudies.org/twiki/bin/view/Main/ProjectStudyPrograms>.

⁴ Kent J. Kille, "International Organization: what do we know and how do we pass on our knowledge," *International Studies Perspectives* 5, no. 3 (2003): 426-432.

⁵ See John Biggs, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (Maidenhead, second ed.: Open University Press, 2003); W.G Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: a scheme* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970).

However, this standard UN Studies curriculum continues to dominate UN teaching as teachers focus on the breadth of the subject in a bid to ensure that students achieve an adequate overview of the various aspects of the UN in what is often the only UN course in the department or faculty. As a result of this broad, list-like curriculum, issues are rarely interrelated through shared themes and concepts. This inhibits the achievement of deep learning as students will perceive the subject as discrete parcels of knowledge that can be individually *learned* (i.e. memorized) rather than *understood* as a complex system of action and interaction.

Deep learning is further inhibited by the lack of opportunity for conceptual learning. Concepts support intellectual development as they allow students to create mental maps of the subject or discipline, thereby enabling students to create understanding by relating and abstracting knowledge. Indeed, Mayer and Land state that students will struggle in their development if they are unable to understand key disciplinary concepts. These 'threshold concepts', which will be explained further below, act as gateways into the discipline.⁶ However, despite the importance of conceptual learning, the standard UN Studies curriculum appears to a large extent a concept-free zone, while threshold concepts such as 'cooperation' are not defined, increasingly ignored or potentially superseded by emerging issues of the 21st century. Moreover, where opportunities for conceptual learning are absent, the subject tends to be interrogated through questions that encourage surface learning, phrasing questions in terms of "*What is the Security Council?*", rather than "*How does the Security Council facilitate cooperation?*" Peacekeeping and human rights are notable exceptions in this concept-free zone as both issues are built around a body of academic debate and research directly related to the UN. These offer students the opportunity to debate concepts such as universality, cosmopolitanism or the 'responsibility to protect' while integrating knowledge and learning from a variety of areas.

Finally, like many other areas in higher education, the field of UN Studies is caught between the competing demands of academic learning and 'training' in preparation for the workplace. The Erfurt School of Public Policy's PROFIO study found that many IR students seek permanent employment within international organization.⁷ However, only a

⁶ Jan H.F Meyer and Ray Land: "Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (2): epistemological considerations and a conceptual framework for teaching and learning," *Higher Education* 49, no. 5 (2005): 373-388.

⁷ PROFIO, Professional Education for International Organizations: *Evaluation of the Carlo-Schmid-Program for Internships in International Organizations and EU Institutions* (Erfurt: Universität

limited number of IR graduates is translated into employment in international organizations, which may be partly explained by the field's degree of specialization versus generalization. While IR degrees are generalist degrees, international organizations most often require specialists in fields such as economics, law, health, biology, engineering and science. UN Human Resource experts state that in addition to specialist subject knowledge, applicants need not only the same skills as required in the business sector but also need to demonstrate the use of professional knowledge and skills in international (inter-cultural) contexts.⁸ The UN Studies curriculum and UN Studies programs do not or only very rarely address this need for specialized knowledge and professional skills. Consequently, for generalists like IR students, fieldwork experience and the highly competitive Junior Professional Programs and National Recruitment Competitive Exams (NRCE) remain key entry routes.

RESEARCH

A review of academic UN literature discloses several shortcomings concerning structures as well as contents of UN research and knowledge production, which can be grouped around three aspects: disciplinary cooperation in research does not produce truly synthesized, interdisciplinary knowledge; produced knowledge about the UN is furthermore selective and partial; knowledge is not systematically arranged in order to build an encompassing, coherent knowledge base.

Since 1990 scholarly literature has experienced a considerable boost, in qualitative as well as in quantitative terms. Whereas the quantitative increase of UN literature is evident, the qualitative aspect of change deserves a closer look. At first sight it is conspicuous that recent publications promise to deliver an interdisciplinary promise, integrating contributions from across the disciplines as well as from authors with a

Erfurt, Erfurt School of Public Policy, 2005), http://www.espp.de/fileadmin/MDB_profio/PDF/Endbericht_Carlo-Schmid-Programm_English_neu.pdf. (accessed March 18, 2008).

⁸ United Nations: *Unlocking the Human Potential for Public Sector Performance, World Public Sector report 2005* (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2005; <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan021616.pdf>, accessed March 18, 2008); World Bank, *YouThink!: Careers in Development: Interview with Dan Vexler*, June 1, 2007 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2007 http://youthink.worldbank.org/issues/development/careers/interview_vexler.php, accessed March 18, 2008); PROFIO, Professional Education for International Organizations: *Evaluation of the Carlo-Schmid-Program for Internships in International Organizations and EU Institutions*.

practitioner background.⁹ This disciplinary cooperation - particularly vibrant between the fields of international law and international relations¹⁰ - is part of an ever intensifying general disciplinary collaboration throughout academia. However, a closer look reveals that the degree of collaboration between various academic fields regarding UN literature is not advanced or integrated enough as to be labeled interdisciplinary. As will be explained later in more detail, the difference between mere disciplinary cooperation and true interdisciplinary research lies in the outcome: while the former process of research produces separate outcomes, which are assembled under a general research question, the latter is a process of synergy that produces an outcome that is a coherent whole. Yet it is precisely the latter kind of academic research, which is needed in order to give answers to today's and future challenges to the UN, such as tackling peacebuilding processes. A peacebuilding strategy will only have the chance to be successfully implemented, if lawyers, economists, political scientists and humanitarians give *one* answer instead of *four*.

Another critical aspect concerning the quality of UN-based research is that certain UN-specific issues and dimensions of the world organization do not attract academic interest, while others are being "overfished". Subjects such as UN history¹¹ or UN management are scarcely addressed. This is also the case for questions concerning the evolution and change of the organization, which try to address the UN from a more abstract, structural dimension. Insufficiently covered by research are also comparative aspects between the UN and other international or supranational organizations such as AU,

⁹ Exemplary of this trend is Simon Chesterman's publication on the role of the UN Secretary General, a joint effort between UN practitioners, academics of international law and international relations, and David Malone's edition on the UN Security Council: Simon Chesterman, ed., *Secretary or General? The UN Secretary-General in World Politics* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); David M. Malone, ed., *The Security Council: from the Cold War to the 21st Century* (Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner, 2004).

¹⁰ See furthermore: Kenneth W Abbott, "International Relations Theory, International Law, and the Regime Governing Atrocities in Internal Conflicts," in: Steven R. Ratner and Anne-Marie Slaughter, eds., *The Methods of International Law* (Washington D.C: The American Society of International Law, 2004), pp. 127-157; Thomas J. Biersteker, et al., eds., *International Law and International Relations. Bridging Theory and Practice* (London/New York: Routledge, 2007); Edward C. Luck, Edward and Michael Doyle, eds., *International Law and Organization: Closing the Compliance Gap* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004); Richard Price, "Detecting ideas and their effects," in: Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 252-265.

¹¹ Within the field of UN history, the UN Intellectual History Project (UNIHP) has done pioneering work in addressing the histories of *ideas*. The project was founded in 1999 and is dedicated to tracing the development of key ideas within the UN, such as development, human rights or human security (See the UNIHPs' Web page: <http://www.unhistory.org>). Yet the history of ideas is only a specific element of UN historiography.

EU and ASEAN.¹² By contrast, research interest concentrates on hot spots like human rights and security¹³, producing a considerable amount of scholarly literature.

Furthermore, few attempts are made to approach the UN at an abstract level and to inquire about roles, functions and structures within the organization. This reveals a grave lacuna in UN research: UN-focused theory-building. This includes abstract, epistemological and methodological approaches at a meta-level, which would provide a base for concrete research. From a political scientist's point of view this would be, for example, to approach questions such as: Is the UN a system, an actor or a structure? What are factors of influence besides national power (for example civil society, language or lessons learned)? How do they influence action and structures of the UN? How can roles of different actors be identified and how can they be observed? How can those approaches be implemented? Instead of developing UN-specific theories, researchers in economics, political science and other social sciences are content with borrowing from traditional disciplinary epistemological funds, partly shared by all three disciplines, such as realism, functionalism, institutionalism and constructivism.¹⁴ This is perplexing considering that the UN is a highly complex and unique institutions. One part of UN literature, which can be assigned to political science, does not even reveal theoretical or ontological underpinnings. This, again, illustrates that certain views about the UN are taken for granted; it also reveals a lack of profound critical self-reflection of UN-research.

Besides these black spots and the selectivity in the production of knowledge, research suffers from another shortcoming: Little effort is made to analyze and systematically arrange the increasing amount of publications in order to develop a coherent and solid knowledge base for future research and teaching.¹⁵ This might be difficult for the simple reason that new approaches transcend disciplinary frameworks and do not fit within traditional disciplinary epistemological categories. For example, how would one classify publications on the Secretary-General, written by UN practitioners and

¹² A recent exception is: Acharya Amitav and Alastair Iain Johnston, eds., *Crafting Cooperation. Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹³ A survey of the United Nations Information System (UNIS) Vienna about UN-related teaching in Austria confirms this finding; see the UN Studies Association's overview of UN study programs at <http://www.unstudies.org/twiki/bin/view/Main/ProjectstudyPrograms>.

¹⁴ Pierson strongly criticizes the predominance of rational/functional approaches to international institutions: Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions and Social Analysis*. (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ A first step in the right direction is: Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Daws, eds., *Oxford Handbook on the United Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

scholars of different academic fields such as international law and political science? Moreover: How to teach interdisciplinary research findings within disciplinary frameworks? The same problem is identified in the ambit of EU studies, where Cini and Bourne find “disciplinary dominance and interdisciplinary aspirations”¹⁶.

The problem concerning interdisciplinary research as well as other highlighted shortcomings has multiple causes: Exchange of knowledge and cooperation between various UN-related fields of study is not institutionalized and depends upon individual initiatives.¹⁷ Cooperation within disciplines or exchange of knowledge is more advanced but also selective and depending on specific initiatives. The lack of structures for cooperation is just one aspect of the core problem, namely a missing “body” of UN studies - a framework for academic research and education, including the following aspects: textbooks as a guide through and synopsis of a joint knowledge base, a shared scientific code of communication, and academic structures such as UN-professorships or institutes. Suffice it to compare the following facts: in 2007 the European Union subsidized 103 Jean-Monnet-Chairs and Centers of Excellence, dedicated to foster research and teaching in the field of European Integration Studies. In the same year the UN, or more accurately the UNESCO, financed 37 UNESCO-chairs worldwide - none of them focusing on the UN but on topics such as education management.

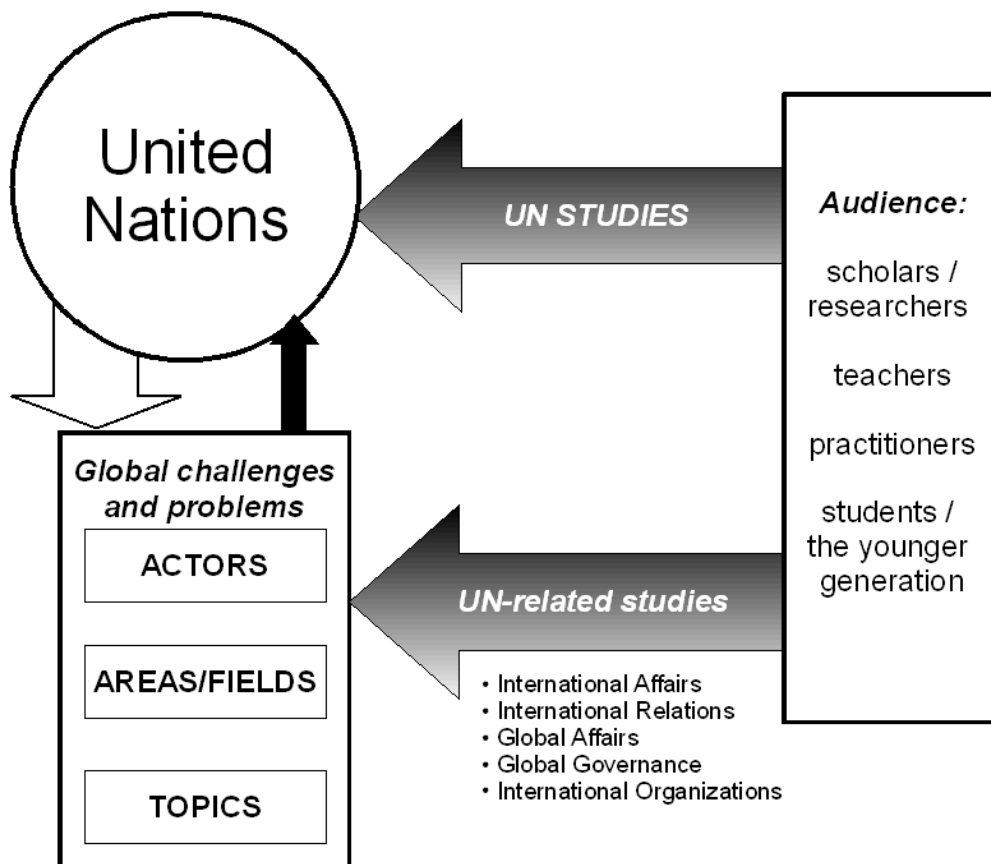
Furthermore, ideational factors are missing, which make up for a “body” of studies such as a common identity of (interdisciplinary) professionals or academics, and a “creative common” as an important requirement for productivity. A common identity presupposes shared values and goals but also depends on social acknowledgement of the epistemic community. Indispensable for a process of identity-building is to possess a creative common, an initial spark of motivation. This motivation, again, is result of a process of critique of current research, of a common definition of problems and needs, so to open and legitimate a new niche in the world of research and teaching.¹⁸

¹⁶ Michelle Cini and Angela K. Bourne, eds., *Palgrave Advances in European Union Studies* (Hampshire/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 5.

¹⁷ Existing worldwide networks such as the Academic Council of the United Nations (ACUNS) and the United Nations Associations (UNAs) pursue goals such as networking and advocacy but do not address the institutionalization of UN research and teaching.

¹⁸ An observation of the development of a number of fields of studies showed that they mainly follow the same path of development. See for example Orren and Skowronek’s description of the development of “Studies in American Political Development”, Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); or Cini and Bourne’s description of the unfolding of EU Studies, Cini and Bourne, eds., *Palgrave Advances in European Union Studies*.

Different views and approaches: UN-related studies and future UN Studies



CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

The production and transfer of knowledge about the UN within the academic system obviously suffer from a number of shortcomings as the analysis of current research and teaching shows. The UN Studies Association summarized these as:

- lack of coherence between initiatives, both academic and professional, leading to structural deficits in which knowledge is transmitted within limited yet fuzzy (national and disciplinary) boundaries;
- lack of common identity and creative commons;

- the difficulty to tackle the complexity of the UN system, operating at the intersection of professions, disciplines, issues, actors, levels; fuzzy boundaries of the UN as an object of study and research;
- gaps between theory and practice, due to differences between professional and academic worlds;
- tensions between formal (academic) structures and emerging informal settings of research and learning (e.g. Model UN).

As a consequence, the UN Studies Association identified a number of key challenges and opportunities faced by the next generation of UN students and researchers:

- new knowledge about the UN needs to be brought together from across disciplines and linked to make it accessible for research and teaching throughout the world;
- teaching structures and programs need to be reformed to provide for an adequate teaching framework for latest interdisciplinary research findings;
- the increasing complexity of the UN system has to be addressed by academia, developing new research areas and drawing on new methodological approaches;
- public awareness about the important role of the UN and investment in UN education and research has to be raised.

Academic Initiatives paving the way towards UN Studies

Despite the weaknesses of the existing field of studies outlined above, numerous interesting and innovative projects in both teaching and research have been developed in the recent past, creating a new impetus for the field and addressing many of the problems associated with the 'old' framework of UN Studies. A growing number of UN-focused summer schools and workshops, special programs, research projects and in particular postgraduate degrees attest to the prevailing interest in UN Studies. The following list of initiatives is by no means exhaustive but shows highlights of recent developments which are beacons for a future field of UN Studies.

In 2005 a consortium of three US universities, comprising of MIT, Harvard University and Tufts University, launched a "UN Studies Initiative" to systematize their provision of over 100 UN-related courses and "to raise the study of UN topics to greater prominence in their curricula, faculty and student discourse, and research agendas".¹⁹ Seton Hall University's Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations, in collaboration with UNA-USA, introduced the UN Intensive Summer Study Program in which students gain first-hand experience of the UN's internal workings by engaging with high-ranking UN officials in student-practitioner workshops.²⁰ Postgraduate students have an increasing choice of specialized programs such as Syracuse University's professional career track program "Transnational Organizations and Leadership" or Kentucky State University's Master in Public Administration with a specialization in International Administration and Development.²¹ Also worth highlighting is the evolving field of peace studies in which the

¹⁹ Druke, Luise, "Recent UN Studies Initiatives," in: Manuel Fröhlich, ed., *UN Studies* (Nomos: Baden-Baden, forthcoming).

²⁰ See Courtney B. Smith, "Bringing practitioner experience into the classroom: the United Nations Intensive Summer Study Program," *International Studies Perspectives* 5 (2004): 325-340; and http://diplomacy.shu.edu/academics/un_studies/summer_program.html (accessed 10 January 2008).

²¹ For further information about the Syracuse study program and other programs mentioned thereafter, please see <http://www.unstudies.org/twiki/bin/view/Main/ProjectStudyPrograms>.

UN often provides a context for analysis.²² (It shall not go unnoticed, though, that in 2004, a front-runner in UN Studies, Yale University, froze its UN program and substituted it with a library program.)

All the while, the UN maintains its own programs. The UN Global Teaching and Learning Project aims to better connect with youth at high school and university level, whereas the UN System Staff College and UNITAR both focus on training UN officials. Two closely connected institutions specialize in academic teaching about UN-related topics: The UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Program is operated in cooperation with the United Nations University (UNU) and focuses on a wide range of UN-specific topics such as water resources, global economy and sustainable development. The UNU organizes seminars about the role of the UN in addressing these topics in cooperation with universities and academic research centers worldwide. None of these programs or institutions, however, has an express focus on the UN (odd as it may seem).

In addition, the move towards student-centered teaching has offered exciting new opportunities for enhanced learning and teaching, nowadays an established feature of IR conferences.²³ No other active learning activity has grown more world-wide than Model United Nations, going back to League of Nations / UN simulations offered by Harvard University since 1927. More and more students take part, either individually or through course requirements. According to the U.N. Cyberschoolbus project, today more than 200,000 high school and college / university students worldwide participate in Model UN programs every year; with more than 400 conferences taking place in 35 countries.²⁴

Along with the establishment of new study initiatives and the further expansion of simulations comes a rise in UN-focused research. Due to the lack of a UN-specific publication, any attempt to provide a concise overview of the research field would require an in-depth analysis of all related publications in neighboring fields, including a systematic evaluation of contributions to journals such as *Global Governance*, *International Organization* or the *Review of International Organizations*. Further aggravating the problem is the assumption that UN-focused academic research endeavors might be well hidden in the context of other research fields.

²² For a comprehensive list of related programs at US universities, see Cornell's Peace Studies Program's website: <http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/PeaceProgram/resources/index.asp?cat=233>.

²³ Those interested in active learning can meet through the International Studies Association's section on Active Learning: <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/alias.isa/home>.

²⁴ United Nations Cyberschoolbus, *Model UN Headquarters, FAQs*, <http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/modelun/faq.html> (accessed March 18, 2008).

We confine our following brief overview on current research directions as showcased by members of the UN Studies Association. Their areas of research include the history of ideas similar to UNIHP (e.g. environmental history; the UN concepts of peace and democracy), supranational leadership research (e.g. political psychology), evaluation of effectiveness and efficiency/organizational theories/international public administration, UN and public information/media/communication theories, UN & governance issues. Another string of new research deals with the UN in the broader context of peace studies and peacebuilding, and the nexus between peace(building), religion, conflict and development.

Complementary to study programs run by the UN, a number of research centers - most of which are autonomous institutes within the UN - offer a bridge between the research community and the UN, or more generally, the policy-making world. These include the UN University in its primary capacity as a think tank, the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). The majority of other UN-focused academic research centers or advocacy groups are located in Western countries (e.g. Reform the UN, Global Policy Forum, Better World Fund, UN Security Council Report, Citizens for Global Solutions).

The geographical dominance of North American and European institutions leads to the deplorable fact that the existing (however few) examples of UN Studies outside the Western Hemisphere, such as the Department of International and UN Studies at the Sun Moon University in South Korea, or the Institute of UN Studies in New Delhi, tend to be overlooked or are simply not well known among Western scholars. Efforts to inquire into and add to the so far sparse information about the perception of the UN in African or Arab States have just begun.²⁵ Future UN Studies thus need to connect all parts of the world, and non-prevalent UN-focused programs and initiatives need to be brought more to the forefront of academics' attention. Last but not least, WFUNA and WFUNA-Youth have developed specific guidelines for youth how to take action in support of and conduct research about the UN and related issues; a laudable effort to shed more light onto the specific motivations, interests and ambitions of the younger generation vis-à-vis the United Nations.

²⁵ For example, the *Five-Nation Student Survey*, as presented by Ingrid Lehmann at World-Wide Colloquium on the UN and New Media, Wels, November 16, 2007, see <http://www.unstudies.org/twiki/bin/view/Main/ResourcesLinks>.

Notwithstanding such promising initiatives bearing the “UN label”, a qualitative and encompassing turn in UN research and teaching is still hampered: Mostly due to structural conditions in the academic world, the subject-matter “UN” is kept at the margins of disciplinary agendas. Knowledge about the organization remains to be produced and transmitted in incoherent “bits and pieces”. Thus, the establishment of a field of studies, which places the UN at its heart, could substantially enhance UN research and teaching.

To conclude, given the obvious lack of coherence between the known initiatives as well as the overall lack of a common identity and ideational commonalities (creative commons), the need arises to 1) conceptualize and 2) institutionalize UN Studies. The UN Studies Initiative in the US has declared UN Studies as beneficial by “directly supporting UN institutions or programs with rich and relevant education and knowledge resources, slowly building a program (...), building a new platform for UN and related studies to launch new projects.”²⁶ As was shown, any such platform has to be truly international and needs to specifically address the motivations and needs of the younger generation. In the following, we outline a vision of a future field of studies, detailing key principles, contents and features.

²⁶ Druke, *Recent UN Studies Initiatives*.

Conceptualizing UN Studies

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR A FUTURE FIELD OF UN STUDIES

Recognizing the limitations of current UN-related Studies, the UN Studies Association asked 'What should be the future of UN Studies?' and 'What should an established field of UN Studies look like?' Following this we identified a number of essential requirements. Most importantly, we claim, UN Studies should be established as a *field of study in its own right*, in an ideational and in an institutional sense. UN Studies should develop its own scientific terminology, epistemology and pedagogy as well as institutional structures. Moreover, it should be a *visible* and *recognized* field of study in order to offer a home and identity to teachers, researchers and students. Thus, UN Studies should accomplish several goals: to link, synthesize and provide knowledge about the UN, to critically reflect on UN activities, to form future UN public civil servants and to give UN practitioners a platform for passing on their knowledge. In short, it should be:

- **interdisciplinary** - creating a community-specific language, common tools and shared knowledge out of different disciplines, to facilitate transdisciplinary interaction, joint research and application of interdisciplinary learning in teaching;
- **academically challenging and innovative** - fostering the development a body of UN specific knowledge, both theoretical and practical;
- **practice- and problem-oriented** - drawing on learning, teaching and research to solve existing and future problems in different policy-areas of the UN;
- **inclusive and integrative** - bringing together academics from various disciplines as well as practitioners, covering all aspects of the UN and embracing all approaches to study it;
- **generalist as well as specialist** - offering specific as well as abstract, theoretical knowledge;
- **engaged with practitioners** - acknowledging and integrating the unique role and insights of practitioners, be that field workers, UN staff or diplomats, maintaining a

productive conversation to facilitate a fertile interaction between theory and practice;

- **global (in thought and action)** - unfolding its academic structures throughout the world, being represented and acknowledged at all universities;
- **utilizing social networks and modern technology** for communication and interaction to draw the young, technology-oriented generation into an international, UN focused debate, and to facilitate interaction between academics and practitioners across the globe.

In the following we will outline how these principles could feature in this new field of studies.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY AS A KEY FEATURE OF UN STUDIES

For various reasons, interdisciplinarity is an essential constituent of future UN Studies: As a driving force for epistemic and academic dynamics, innovation and creativity, interdisciplinarity will be the motor for the promotion of the new field of UN Studies. As its fundamental value, interdisciplinarity will impinge on the programmatic alignment and the material structure of future UN Studies. Ultimately, the UN as a multi-dimensional and complex entity in itself demands an interdisciplinary treatment in study and research. To argue with Klein, the UN does not come in discipline-shaped blocks²⁷ - thus the only commensurate preparation of students for practical life in international relations and the UN will be within the framework an interdisciplinary education. It is for these reasons that interdisciplinarity is one of our key principles for a future field of UN Studies.

Before discussing the benefits of interdisciplinarity for UN Studies, the concept itself needs to be clarified, as it is far from being a generally accepted notion. In the last decades interdisciplinary research projects and curricula have been gaining ground in academia, and a consequence, multiple differentiations between cross-, pluri-, infra-, and multidisciplinary have arisen. In her enlightening study on interdisciplinarity, Klein makes a critical point, stating that interdisciplinarity is "neither a subject matter nor a

²⁷ Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), p. 34, 11.

body of content," it is a *process of cooperation* to achieve an integrative synthesis.²⁸ This process extends along two axes: On the horizontal axis, cooperation is realized between various disciplines or fields of work, and on the vertical axis, cooperation occurs between different (societal) types of actors, such as scholars, practitioners and extra-academic actors such as think tanks.²⁹ Interdisciplinarity as the most *advanced form of collaboration* differs from other ways of disciplinary collaboration in that it requires all involved parties to free themselves from their disciplinary paradigms³⁰ and to step with an open mind into the process of cooperation, ready to adopt new ways of thinking, new terminology and new approaches to problem-solving. Less integrative forms of collaboration, such as multidisciplinary or pluri-disciplinary, do not affect traditional disciplines. Instead they combine contributions from various disciplines but refrain from merging disciplinary methods, ontology or terminology. Interdisciplinary collaboration by contrast, can affect disciplinary contents, structures and identity: it is "a conscious attempt to integrate material from various fields of knowledge into a 'new, single, intellectually coherent entity."³¹ This carries with it considerable problems which will be discussed at a later point.

The unique contribution of interdisciplinary synergy is to yield an *added value*, advancing or generating (new) terminology, offering innovative views of the subject-matter and approaches to problem-solving etc. It is this unique form of cooperation which paves the way for scientific innovation and the creation of new disciplines.³² Besides relating to an integrative process of work, interdisciplinarity can also be perceived in a normative sense as a *value or goal*, which often is associated to a holistic view on things, innovation and change. It stands for a *competence* to understand epistemologies and methodologies of other disciplines and to approach problems from different angles and develop innovative solutions.

Turning to the question of how to implement interdisciplinarity within a field of UN Studies: Disciplinary collaboration could be established in manifold ways and on various

²⁸ Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice*, p. 188.

²⁹ This is not only an issue in academia, but also in government, industry and the professions; see Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice*, p. 12.

³⁰ Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice*, p. 13.

³¹ Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice*, p. 57.

³² The motto of the OECD seminar on interdisciplinarity in 1970 was: "The 'inter-discipline' of today is the 'discipline' of tomorrow"; Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), eds., *Interdisciplinarity: Problems of Teaching and Research in Universities* (Paris, OECD: 1972), p. 9.

academic levels. Interdisciplinary research projects and the establishment of interdisciplinary UN Studies institutes/research centers are a first step. New interdisciplinary university programs, courses and curricula, as well as new teaching methods (e.g. problem-based learning) bring these new approaches into the classroom and enable a new understanding of the UN among future professionals, researchers and practitioners. With regard to the first category - doubtless the most advanced implementation of interdisciplinarity - an innovative university model in which all disciplines are grouped around an area of special emphasis would be an option.³³ A model like this was proposed by an OECD-study on interdisciplinarity and could perfectly serve as blueprint for an interdisciplinary UN Studies University. This "ideal UN University" would be decentralized, maintaining institutes in all parts of the world, in order to be truly international. It would recruit students and faculty from all over the world from academic and UN practitioner backgrounds. This university would offer various levels of study in which students pass through different forms of education: an introductory level with a broad orientation, an undergraduate level that provides a chance to explore single disciplines more thoroughly, and a Graduate degree level, where students learn about interdisciplinary approaches and methods. Whereas the structure of the undergraduate level could be similar to traditional disciplinary UN courses, graduate study would be fully interdisciplinary, consisting of interdisciplinary courses and interdisciplinary trained faculty. Content and curricula could be established along different fields of policies or regions. Students should be offered the possibility of UN internships and the opportunity to develop specialized knowledge about the UN, as well as skills necessary for UN employment, such as administration and management.

Despite the promising advantages of interdisciplinarity and these manifold possibilities in approaching interdisciplinary UN Studies, the actual implementation will encounter several challenges, structurally, psychologically or linguistically.³⁴ Some of those obstacles issue from the disciplinary structure of academia: Before entering the research phase, UN studies scholars will have to develop a common view of problems, a common terminology and methodology - regardless of disciplinary paradigmatic

³³ CERI, eds., *Interdisciplinarity: Problems of Teaching and Research in Universities*, pp. 253-257.

³⁴ The OECD-study mentions similar problem categories, see Asa Briggs and Guy Michaud, "Problems and Solutions," in: CERI, eds., *Interdisciplinarity: Problems of Teaching and Research in Universities*, pp. 189-194.

constraints.³⁵ This framework for scientific research and education, including textbooks, a common identity and shared values, is given *a priori* in the case of disciplinary research. The lack of an “institutional and mental body of interdisciplinarity”³⁶ – the “creative common” – which is an important requirement for productivity, significantly hampers interdisciplinary work. It is hardly surprising that scholars and practitioners working interdisciplinary often “find themselves homeless, in a state of social and intellectual marginality.”³⁷ Another problem that relates to structural conditions of academia: The (disciplinary) university system is “about power, hierarchy and control in the organization of knowledge.”³⁸ Every discipline is obliged to prove its “scholarly quality” by developing proper means and mechanisms for legitimizing produced knowledge.³⁹ Due to the lack of institutional embodiment, interdisciplinary UN research projects will have to develop proper means to legitimate their findings.

UN Studies scholars who wish to realize interdisciplinary ambitions, be it for research or teaching purposes, additionally have to overcome serious material difficulties, such as bureaucratic and financial problems. They not only have to run through the standard institutional or disciplinary administrative loop for approval; they also have to pass through all necessary fields of competence of other involved disciplines. Scholars usually do neither receive extra funds, nor personal assistance to design and realize interdisciplinary curricula, modules and projects, which usually are rather time-consuming.

Concluding, it might be said that there is not “the one” way of realizing interdisciplinary UN Studies and that the institutionalization process will face serious challenges. However, interdisciplinarity should be the ultimate aim in helping to successfully establish UN Studies at all academic levels.

³⁵ Klein argues that “senior faculty are most likely and perhaps the best suited for interdisciplinary activities” because “they are the ones who can risk time out of the disciplinary mainstream, and they are the ones who often need new challenges.” Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice*, p. 182.

³⁶ Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice*, p. 182.

³⁷ Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice*, p. 13.

³⁸ Michael Moran, “Interdisciplinarity and Political Science,” *Politics* 26 no. 2 (2006): 74.

³⁹ Moran contends, for example, that within the academic field of political science the “peer review” proceedings were developed as evaluative “ideology” and to achieve “scholarly” legitimacy. Moran, “Interdisciplinarity and Political Science”, p. 76.

KEY ISSUES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF FUTURE UN STUDIES

Future research will no doubt continue to follow UN activity in a number of areas (geographically as well as thematically), addressing the challenges that confront the UN. Here, a comprehensive overview of future research topics is beyond the scope of this article. However, following our analysis of shortcomings in current research and teaching we identified areas and approaches which have so far received little attention and which would contribute significantly to the establishment of a field of UN Studies.

Future UN Studies should address the dominant paradigm of state-centricity in existing UN research by considering not only non-state actors but also by foregrounding the UN as an organization and political system in itself. Moving beyond diplomacy acknowledges the role of organizational actors, processes and structures. This will not only raise questions about the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization - issues that can be addressed in tandem with policy studies, organizational sociology and management studies - but may also raise questions of the UN's political foundation. This analysis may further place the UN reform debate into new context, re-emphasizing the political dimension of structural change and underlining the "political contract" that is embodied not only in the Charter but also expressed through structures and processes.

In addition to challenging dominant paradigms, future UN Studies research should place a stronger emphasis on conceptual-theoretical development, both in cooperation with other disciplines and emergent from within the field of UN Studies. Initiating a discussion on 'threshold concepts',⁴⁰ i.e. concepts that are central to the subject or discipline and therefore to one's understanding of the subject, will question whether 'cooperation' sufficiently captures the complexity of the UN in the 21st century, in which issues of diplomacy have been joined by an increasing organizational dimension (e.g. supranational leadership, growing UN activity in development, peacekeeping, the environment, health etc.) and the introduction of a variety of international actors. For example, concepts such as representation or efficiency may become increasingly relevant.

While engagement of academics with practitioners has been and should continue to be an important avenue of learning for both sides, UN research should remain focused on the rigorous application of theory to practice. To achieve this, UN Studies could learn from research of other international organizations. Potential issues of interest include policy-

⁴⁰ Meyer and Land: "Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge"

analysis, institutionalist approaches, agenda-setting, multi-level governance, integration and identity. Moreover, comparative international organizational research may further draw out the unique aspects of the UN as well as draw organizational-managerial lessons from the variety of cultures, geopolitical contexts, political histories and philosophies. Another area for a UN Studies research agenda is to explore the role of language and ideas and to further UN historiography. Sustained research and theory-building in these matters could encourage new perspectives on the UN. Analyzing the role of language and ideas, both empirically and methodologically, would also contribute to advance UN Studies methodology, as methodological approaches to the historical, linguistic or conceptual study of the UN are non-existent.

Dedicated research centers and endowed professorships, as well as cross-organizational research clusters will enable this new field of studies to flourish. New platforms for exchange, such as academic journals, publication series and events such as workshops, symposia, summer schools and conferences should encourage comparative, meta-theoretical and cross-disciplinary analysis. New digital media may not only offer the required technological tools to support such research (frameworks), the swift developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) also give rise to a wide spectrum of questions concerning global communication and knowledge management that all pertain to the UN as an organization and global player, and, consequently, are pivotal to future research about the UN.

THE UN STUDIES CURRICULUM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

A new UN Studies curriculum should encourage global thinking and acting by facilitating the development of intercultural empathy⁴¹ and engagement. Students need to be encouraged to look beyond the confines of state-centric world views to understand not only the unique features of international relations but the unique form of governance that is the UN. Most importantly, a new UN Studies curriculum needs to achieve qualitative, deep learning and bridge the education/training divide. Interdisciplinarity, active

⁴¹ A. L. Morgan, "Toward a global Theory of Mind: the potential benefits of presenting a range of IR theories through active learning," *International Studies Perspectives* 4, no. 4 (2003): 351-370.

learning, conceptual learning and new subject agendas will support this move of UN Studies teaching into the 21st century.

A new UN Studies curriculum needs to restructure its content to enable deep learning, to be academically challenging and engaged with other disciplines. This new structure needs to be based on conceptual learning. This can be done, for example through 'short & thick' or 'long & thin' conceptual curricula. 'Short & thick' frameworks would see conceptual learning integrated into or developed around the existing standard UN Studies curriculum by conceptualizing and theorizing currently under-theorized aspects. While this offers opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and further development of research, this approach continues to focus on the breadth, rather than the depth of study. By contrast 'long & thin' concepts remodel the curriculum around threshold concepts, which act as anchor for analysis and discussion, supporting the integration of knowledge. This not only encourages further research, including student research, but also supports deep learning and opportunities for progression and specialization. Conceptual learning may also open up opportunities for the introduction of different learning methods that enhance the linkage between research and teaching (e.g. student research, enquiry-based learning), interdisciplinarity and learning with or from practitioners (e.g. student-practitioner workshops⁴²).

A new UN Studies curriculum should consciously and pro-actively integrate different forms of active learning into the classroom. UN Studies certainly has been at the forefront of pedagogical innovations by providing opportunities for students to simulate UN diplomacy in Model UN conferences. These conferences allow students to represent a country of their choice in one of the UN bodies and enact the country's political agenda through negotiating and bargaining with other students. Model UN thus offers students the opportunity to practice skills valued by employers but also test theoretical learning in practice, developing critical and analytical skills. A new UN Studies curriculum should draw on these opportunities for deep learning by integrating small-scale simulations and/or participation in Model UN into their curriculum. To achieve this, activities need to be carefully aligned with both content and assessment and allow for reflection and integration of knowledge, for example through debriefing sessions.⁴³ Integrating active

⁴² Courtney B. Smith, "Bringing practitioner experience into the classroom: the United Nations Intensive Summer Study Program," *International Studies Perspectives* 5, no. 2 (2004): 325-340.

⁴³ According to Kolb, this cyclical process, i.e. "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience", is central to the achievement of deep learning. David A. Kolb,

learning into the curriculum also means awarding credit for participation in Model UN as well as recognizing experiential learning, be that in-service learning or internships.

A new UN Studies curriculum also needs to find answers to the question of academic learning versus training for employment, in particular for employment in international organizations. Active learning methods, a curriculum that supports progression and a sector that caters for a diversity of learning interests and needs may be this answer, as may be greater attention to skills development and problem-based teaching.⁴⁴ New Master programs such as those of Kentucky State University should be offered to provide training opportunities for students who wish to work in international organizations. Professional postgraduate degrees need to combine the development of specialized skills with a deepening of academic learning, focusing on the distinct legal, political and cultural context of the UN and other international organizations. Most importantly, however, it is the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge as well as the translation of theoretical knowledge to practice that will distinguish the future UN Studies curriculum. The introduction of problem-based learning (PBL), especially in Master programs, may address both academic and professional needs.⁴⁵ By developing solutions to real-world problems PBL has a number of advantages that reach across the academic and professional divide as students engage with the latest research in UN Studies and apply theoretical learning to real-life cases, mirroring the profession they hope to join. As a collective learning approach, PBL provides an opportunity for students to work across disciplines, engaging with students (and professional) from a variety of fields, and developing core skills such as team working, communication and intercultural sensitivity.

Finally, future UN Studies should take into account a range of learning needs and interests. New short courses and summer schools should be introduced which focus on either academic (e.g. emphasis on research knowledge) or professional learning (e.g. professional skills), or those that explicitly enable and support a discourse between the two. Topical workshops and courses should be offered to students and professionals alike, while new Master programs should facilitate specialization and progression. This new field of UN Studies requires an infrastructure of dedicated teaching and research centers to

Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development (N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1984), p. 38.

⁴⁴ PROFIO, *Evaluation of the Carlo-Schmid-Program for Internships in International Organizations and EU Institutions*.

⁴⁵ William Hutchings, *Enquiry-based Learning: Definitions and Rationale* (Manchester: University of Manchester, Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning, 2007), p. 35.

support a progression-oriented curriculum and provide a variety of UN-focused courses at undergraduate and graduate level, as well as for lifelong learning. Developing a new curriculum of UN Studies is therefore central to establishing a new field of studies.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE FUTURE UN GENERATION

Advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) and digital media are essential elements of future UN Studies: they are key in engaging the younger generation and enabling collaboration between UN researchers, practitioners and students. We can only guess what the world might look like in 15 years, especially in light of the quantum leaps in digitalization. We know for sure, however, that today's young people's interest in discussing and acting upon global issues will also affect the shape of the future UN. The "Net Generation"⁴⁶, born 1977 onward, is not only the demographically strongest but also the most internationally-minded and connected generation ever, possessing a unique global spirit. This generation has grown up with the internet, which has in turn influenced the way social life, politics and economics function.

The 2007 worldwide virtual/real-time colloquium "The United Nations and the New Media/Information Age - Education for the Next Generation of 'the People of the United Nations'" recommended that the UN better communicate with youth and seek the dialogue in digital spaces.⁴⁷ As a consequence, evolving forms and methods of educating the net generation should be incorporated in future UN Studies - not only limited to using computers but also including ways to connect students with others outside the classroom as well as offering practical application of digital know-how.⁴⁸

Along the lines of various UN youth programs and other related activities such as Model United Nations or the UN Cyberschoolbus Project, other peer-oriented initiatives should be fostered. It is well understood that the internet and ICTs have already

⁴⁶ Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, (New York: Portfolio / Penguin Group, 2006).

⁴⁷ Dan McQuillan, Royal Society of Arts, internetartizans.co.uk, *Blogging Internet & Social Change, Human Rights and Innovation*, Virtual Presentation at World-Wide Colloquium on the UN and New Media, (Wels, November 16, 2007; www.acuns.at).

⁴⁸ Pletka, Bob, Ed.D., *Educating the Net Generation. How to Engage Students in the 21st Century* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2007).

conquered classrooms.⁴⁹ By nature, this form of teaching and learning is interactive and uses a comprehensive set of tools which are ever-expanding. The internet offers countless opportunities for the exchange of information at lightning speed: faster access, faster research and more (digitalized) information. The UN not only plays a vital role in disseminating information and knowledge, it is also subject to the dynamic changes fueled by new technologies.

Teachers and researchers need to get better acquainted with the immense web 2.0 toolbox of social software at their disposal, which includes several types of new technologies that aim to support the increasing need for new forms of social networking (communication, interaction and collaboration), such as wikis or blogs. Social software could help UN scholars and researchers learn how to work with peers worldwide, how to share information as well as how to collaborate. Based on a high level of openness and transparency, such software encourages its users to collaboratively create content and thus generate new knowledge, in a self-organized, yet still orchestrated fashion - all of which are key prerequisites for successful interdisciplinary research about the UN. Last but not least, web 2.0 technologies allow the building of bonds between Western, Latin American, Asian and African academics and therefore enable and foster interdisciplinarity across geographical, social and political divides.

While exploring the many facets and opportunities of digital media and new information and communication technologies, it should not be forgotten, however, that these technologies are merely tools to better educate and engage the younger generation. They are indispensable in our search for answers to the key issues and questions of future UN Studies as outlined in this article.

⁴⁹ Kent J. Kille, Matthew Krain, and Jeffrey S. Lantis: *Active Learning Across Borders. Lessons from an Interactive Workshop in Brazil*, Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Chicago, IL, February 28-March 3, 2007; <http://www.wooster.edu/ir/Active-TeachingIR/ISA07.pdf> (accessed March 18, 2008).

Conclusions

Interest in the study of the UN has always been and continues to be strong as the number of publications and the various initiatives globally attest. However, UN research, and subsequently the UN curriculum, has not assumed a distinct identity as a field of study. Instead, students of the UN have approached the organization from their specific disciplinary angles and focused on individual issues, actors and thematic fields. In this approach the UN serves as the backdrop for an analysis of global problems and challenges, not the focus of analysis and theorizing. Thus, UN research is unnecessarily disjointed, in parts too descriptive and under-theorized, in parts marginalized by UN-related studies. The boundaries of UN research are as fuzzy as its core is under-determined. This situation is further reinforced through the existing standard UN curriculum, a lack of institutionalized research and lack of global interaction between researchers. It is also reinforced by state-centric paradigms in which the UN functions at best as an area for member states or, cynically, as a tool of larger powers.

This model of inquiry is unlikely to meet the challenges of the 21st century in which the UN will not only see an increased level of activity but in which problems such as global warming and pandemic disease create truly global threats while conflict, under-development and human rights issues continue to dominate the UN agenda. With technology fundamentally changing how people communicate and interact locally as well as globally, and with a new generation of globally concerned and technologically literate students and researchers emerging, UN research faces new demands that a disjointed research agenda will increasingly struggle to meet. To fully utilize the UN to meet the challenges of the 21st century, greater understanding of the UN as an organization and as a political, social and legal system (i.e. its structures, processes and interaction) is necessary. In other words, the questions of effectiveness and efficiency can no longer be one of cooperative diplomacy alone but need to be re-framed through questions such as those of leadership, management, representation and policy-analysis.

The design of a future UN field of studies needs to take these trends into account. The UN Studies Association has been set up to meet these mixed challenges at the crossroads of conceptual work and institutionalized collaboration facilitated by new technologies. As an emerging international community of UN practitioners and academics

dedicated to advance research and teaching about the UN, the Association's vision is to promote the formation of an interdisciplinary, UN-focused field of studies, and to build a strong UN Studies community that takes UN research and teaching to the next level. On the one hand, it aims to provide a unifying idea which could function as the intellectual framework for a future field of UN studies. This will be realized by developing a concept of UN Studies including key contents, features, methods and tools. On the other hand, the Association aims to set in motion a process of institutionalization of the next generation of UN Studies, by providing an online portal for collaboration, communication and knowledge-sharing and by realizing a number of projects, including seminars and workshops, the development of teaching material and other publications such as textbooks, journals and monographs. The UN Studies Association welcomes and seeks the engagement with scholars and students across the world, to reflect a diversity of opinions and approaches in establishing a new field of study.

For more information visit www.unstudies.org.

UN Studies Association
c/o VSO
Hannoversche Strasse 2
10115 Berlin
Germany

unstudies@unstudies.org
www.unstudies.org

