



- Mission Statement -

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The UN Studies Association

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General Information

Co-chairs:	Julia Harfensteller, University of Bremen / TU Berlin Henrike Paepcke, DIAS
Advisory Board:	Alistair Edgar, ACUNS, Wilfrid Laurier University Luise Druke, University of Hannover, Suffolk University Ingrid Lehmann, University of Salzburg Harald Müller, Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt
Partner:	Academic Council of the United Nations (ACUNS)
Launch:	June 6, 2007 in New York City at ACUNS annual meeting
Duration:	Open end

Membership. The UNSA is open to all UN academics, scholars, practitioners, policy-makers and others around the world who are interested in the project. Notwithstanding our special focus on the younger generation, the group works inter-generational and seeks input and feedback from long-term experts. The group comprises over 35 (informal) members today, number rising. Along with its expansion comes a growing diversity in terms of backgrounds and vocations (UN, universities, think tanks, business sector) as well as nationalities.

Structure / governance. The group is co-chaired by the two initiators, Julia Harfensteller and Henrike Paepcke, who are responsible for the general management of the UNSA - mainly dealing with questions concerning the strategic planning and implementation. They facilitate communication and collaboration among members and orchestrate the various projects, which are run and organized by members themselves. The group's advisory board provides ongoing assistance and guidance on issues of strategy, management and process; particularly on networking, outreach and partnerships efforts.

Executive Summary

The UN Studies Association is an **emerging international community of UN practitioners and academics** committed to advance research and teaching about the UN.

The group'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 – **“the next generation” of UN Studies**.

The project pursues two objectives. On the one hand, it aims to provide for an **intellectual framework** for a future field of UN studies. The ideational basis will be realized by developing a concept of UN Studies including key contents and features; furthermore by advancing theory-building and developing innovative methods for research and teaching. On the other hand, the project aims to set in motion a **process of institutionalization** of the next generation of UN Studies, by building structures for collaboration, communication and knowledge-sharing as well as by realizing concrete projects.

The working group is **open to all interested parties** who seek to enter into a dialogue with like-minded UN researchers and practitioners across disciplines, fields, and professions; as well as to all those who wish to engage themselves actively in the community, contributing with ideas, information or projects.

With the help of **new web technologies**, members can share expertise, best practices and knowledge with other interested parties by means of our wiki-based “UN Studies Portal” (www.unstudies.org).

Our Motivation: deficits in UN research and teaching

Since the working group's founding in June 2007, members have spent considerable time on discussing the key shortcomings, problem causes, challenges and opportunities of UN Studies, in the overall search for a common vision, agenda and language.

Today's UN research and teaching **suffer from various shortcomings concerning contents, structures, the transfer and production of knowledge about the UN.**

In the following, we will present the working group's vision for tomorrow's UN Studies as a stand-alone field of interdisciplinary studies about the UN. Such a field of study is aimed to uncover critical shortcomings of existing UN-related studies such as “Global Governance” or “International Relations” study programs – first and foremost, their **lack of a systematic focus** on the diverse dimensions and unique role of the UN in global affairs.

Among the various problems identified by the UNSA, UN-related studies suffer from the following key shortcomings, *inter alia*:

- **Curricula and syllabi in social sciences and law** rarely focus on the UN; UN-specific syllabi are an exception and not known or recognized throughout the academic world.
- **Teaching methods and tools are inadequate**; textbooks are insufficient to sensitize and motivate students to learn more about the UN.
- **New initiatives** to foster and increase student knowledge about the UN such as Model United Nations are **rarely part of the academic credit point system.**
- **Certain issues relating to the UN have been neglected** and deserve more attention; for example, UN history, or management and the UN.

- By systematically highlighting one particular dimension or function of the UN, disciplinary approaches promote a **biased attitude** about the UN.
- **Highly specific knowledge on the UN** is focused on thematic issues such as peace and security, human rights and development, thereby suppressing a more generalist view on the UN and an encompassing comprehension.
- There is a **lack of mutual interest between researchers** of UN / EU / Global Governance Studies; as a result, knowledge gaps at disciplinary interstices emerge.
- **Practitioners** are increasingly integrated in the production of knowledge; yet, they **have no clear role in the ambit of teaching**; their enormous potential to motivate students and to prepare them for practical life is not sufficiently acknowledged.

The UNSA unveiled a **set of problem causes**: first and foremost, the lack of coherence between UN-focused study programs and a lack of common identity as well as various structural problems. We also recognized the difficulty to tackle the complexity of the UN system and stated enormous gaps between theory and practice. Last but not least, we found enormous tensions between formal (academic) structures and emerging informal settings of research and learning.

Based on these findings, we developed the following vision for UN Studies:

Our Vision

Our **vision** is to advance research and teaching about the UN and to promote a UN-focused field of studies. The field of UN studies...

a) ...is **integrated** in various ways:

- it brings together academics and practitioners
- it is internationally acknowledged
- it covers all aspects and facets of UN activities and approaches to study the UN
- it is interdisciplinary
- it provides theoretical knowledge on the one hand, and practically applicable knowledge on the other hand, in order to adequately prepare the next generation of UN experts such as international public servants or researchers.

b) ... is a **field of study in its own right**, in an ideational as well as in an institutional sense. UN Studies has to develop its proper scientific terminology, epistemology and pedagogy as well as institutional structures with adequate curricula, institutes and faculty, which identifies with such a field of studies.

c) ... **forms young professionals** – future public civil servants at the UN – as well as **young academics**: future UN experts. Practically applicable knowledge as well as theoretical knowledge shall be equally transmitted.

Therefore our motto is: “UN Studies – the next generation” – a worldwide “UN studies” community of researchers, teachers with a common identity, theoretical approaches, scientific terminology, pedagogy, and curricula.

Future challenges and opportunities

One of the key challenges is to **link and bring together UN-related knowledge** and make it accessible for research and teaching throughout the world. Furthermore, the UNSA considers reforming teaching structures and building an integrated education program vital in order to provide for an adequate **teaching framework** for latest interdisciplinary research findings. Developing **interdisciplinary curricula** is costly in terms of time and engagement, since bureaucratic and structural boundaries have to be mastered. For UN Studies to succeed, we also wish to **raise public awareness** about the important role of the UN. Awareness is currently low; as a result, the incentives to **invest in UN education** or other projects are weak.

The UNSA identified **three major opportunities**:

- a growing number of new communication tools
- the younger generation, frontrunner of the digital revolution
- the synergetic effects and innovative power of interdisciplinary communication and cooperation

Our goals for the next year

- Build a growing diverse network of members and partners worldwide
- Develop a joint concept of UN Studies and ways for implementation
- Send a signal and raise awareness about the current desolate state of UN related research and teaching; promote the necessity to establish UN Studies as a field of study in its own right
- Encourage members to share problems and experiences, to enter into a dialogue across disciplines and professions, to build a joint knowledge base, as well as to plan and implement joint (research and other) projects
- Provide a tool for young UN experts to express and discuss new ideas

Participants will benefit from...

- A unique learning and collaboration experience, using techniques of social networking
- Easy access to resources and like-minded people
- Applying new principles such as sharing, “peering” (working with peers), openness and transparency
- Virtual collaborative workspaces, shared across disciplines, professions and distance

Our activities

- **Conceptual work** at various levels: defining the special need for a comprehensive field of UN Studies; working towards a common understanding and key features of UN Studies
- **Building a knowledge base** by developing specific contents, methods, theoretic approaches and/or tools of UN Studies research and teaching
- Planning and realizing **joint projects** such as seminars, curricula, etc.
- **Providing means of communication** and collaboration; facilitating networking, disseminating information about UN Studies-related activities

Our outlets for action

- (Online-) conferences, panels, workshops and seminars
- UN Studies Newsletter and other planned publications such as the Journal of International Organization Studies
- Our website and online UN Studies Portal at www.unstudies.org

We are happy to take your comments and questions!

Please contact us: workinggroup@unstudies.org