

Toward “Best Practices” in Scholar–Practitioner Relations: Insights from the Field of Inter-American Affairs¹

MARIANO E. BERTUCCI AND FABIÁN BORGES-HERRERO
University of Southern California

CLAUDIA FUENTES-JULIO
University of Denver

This paper explores a number of success stories of scholar–practitioner interactions on issues such as democracy promotion, fostering economic development, reducing extreme income inequality, and foreign policy-making toward the United States, among others, to argue that the so-called scholar–practitioner gap in International Relations might not be as wide as it may seem. It also highlights some of the salient limits to effective relations between the worlds of ideas and policy, and it discusses the main transmission belts—both individual and institutional—through which scholarly outputs influence the different stages of policymaking. The paper closes by proposing a number of “best practices” to enhance effective scholar–practitioner relations in inter-American affairs and beyond, including tying research to significant world events, synthesizing research findings into digestible components, developing relations of trust with allies in government, providing concrete policy recommendations based on rigorous research and cost-effectiveness analyses, and integrating practitioners into academic departments, among others.

Keywords: scholars, practitioners, best practices, international relations, inter-American affairs

¹The authors would like to thank Abraham F. Lowenthal for conceiving and co-organizing the international conference at the University of Southern California which led to the preparation of this manuscript. We are grateful to Dr. Lowenthal and three anonymous reviewers for thoughtful comments on previous versions of this article. We have also benefitted from comments and discussions with Richard Snyder, Blanca Heredia, and Kevin Casas-Zamora. We express special thanks to Jason Tockman, who worked together with us as a rapporteur in preparing the first version of the workshop report upon which this article is based.

We also gratefully acknowledge financial assistance granted by the School of International Relations and the Center for International Studies, the Office of Global Initiatives in the Office of the Provost, and the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at the University of Southern California, the Latin America, and the Caribbean Regional Bureau of the United Nations Development Program, the International Development Research Centre of Canada, and the Fundación Vidanta of Mexico.

Scholars and Policymakers: *Can They Learn from Each Other?*

The literature on scholar–practitioner interactions in International Relations (IR) is dominated by a sense of chasm.² Practitioners generally conceive scholarly outputs as abstract discussions specifically tailored to satisfy the intellectual demands of other scholars rather than responding to the pressing issues policymakers must deal with on a daily basis. Many scholars, in turn, disdain the oversimplifications and lack of analytical rigor they often attribute to policy officials. IR is often described as a self-regulated field in which professional success depends almost entirely on one’s reputation among peers. In this field, there is a strong incentive to produce highly specialized and methodologically rigorous research because this type of work, as opposed to teaching or public service, is what a scholar’s career advancement is predicated on. Hence, IR scholars focus on generating novel arguments that will impress other scholars, rather than policymakers. Policymakers, on their part, want to know *how* events occur and pursue knowledge specific to the policy process, that is, about what policy levers to activate in order to shape outcomes in the desired direction, as opposed to knowing *why* events occur and producing general explanations that abstract from the workings of policy processes (George 1993; Kruzal 1994; Lepgold and Nincic 2001; Jentleson 2002; Walt 2005; Nau 2008; Nye 2008a; Krasner 2011).

This perceived gap, according to some observers, is growing larger. Even though there have been several examples of how the study of international relations could and did contribute useful insights to foreign policy practitioners (e.g., research on nuclear strategy and arms control was widely used by U.S. policymakers during the Cold War and research on “democratic peace theory”—that democracies do not fight each other—has recently entered popular discourse and also shaped policy in the United States), these contributions have allegedly become more scarce as IR scholars increasingly turn to theoretical models that only qualified insiders can penetrate and that policymakers consider irrelevant (Nye 2008a:654).

Missing from the literature on scholar–practitioner interactions in IR is a more systematic focus on the experience of those trained social scientists with professional trajectories as such that have often played important roles in government.³ The experience of these “in-and-outers” suggests that the gap might not be as wide as it may seem. In the field of Inter-American affairs, for example, scholars both in Latin America and in North America often have access to policymaking as direct as those of business interests.⁴ Two of the most influential Latin American presidents of the last 30 years, Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil and Ricardo Lagos of Chile, have social science PhDs. President Rafael Correa of Ecuador has a PhD in Economics. Three of the last four Mexican presidents—Carlos Salinas, Ernesto Zedillo, and Felipe Calderón—have had graduate training in the social sciences. Most Latin American Finance Ministers and Central Bank presidents in recent years have PhDs in Economics. Some of the best-known Latin American foreign policy practitioners of recent years—former Foreign Ministers Jorge G. Castañeda of Mexico and Celso Lafer of Brazil, as well as

²This paper draws upon an international workshop held at the University of Southern California on April 2011 on Scholars, Practitioners, and Inter-American Relations. Forty-one scholars and practitioners from eleven different countries (seven Latin American nations, two European countries, as well as Canada and the United States) gathered together to address three inter-related topics: (i) the challenges and successes they had faced in translating research into policy, (ii) the effects research has had on specific policies, and (iii) the strategies that scholars had adopted to maximize their influence over the policy-making process. The experiences discussed in this article constitute original data on how academic work can and does shape policy on issues pertaining to inter-American affairs (and beyond).

³Two partial exceptions to this situation are Nye (2008a) and Weiss and Kittikhoun (2011).

⁴By “inter-American affairs” we mean any cross-national-boundary process and/or outcome pertaining to at least two countries in the region.

Mexico's late Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Rico, and Professor Marco Aurélio Garcia of Brazil, personal foreign policy advisor to Presidents Lula and Dilma Rousseff—came from academia. Chile, which has had one of the most noteworthy international policies in recent years, has relied heavily on social scientists: former Foreign Ministers José Miguel Insulza (now Secretary General of the Organization of American States), Ignacio Walker and Juan Gabriel Valdés; former Deputy Foreign Ministers Angel Flisfisch and Heraldo Muñoz (now head of the United Nations Development Program's Regional Bureau for Latin America), for example (Lowenthal 2010).

In the United States, President Barack Obama's Assistant Secretaries of State for Inter-American Affairs were Arturo Valenzuela, a well-recognized scholar, and, his predecessor, Ambassador Thomas Shannon, who obtained a PhD in politics at Oxford. Several key figures in shaping U.S. policy toward countries in the Western Hemisphere over the past 40 years have been professional social scientists, mostly operating in government on an in-and-out basis: Luigi Einaudi, Richard Feinberg, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Constantine Menges, Robert Pastor, and Susan Kaufman Purcell, among others (Lowenthal 2010). The United States-based scholarship on Inter-American relations has been dominated by scholars more interested in communicating with the policy community than with the academic world, more comfortable writing in *Foreign Affairs* or *Foreign Policy* than in the *American Political Science Review* or *International Organization*.⁵

Inter-American affairs are marked by a stark dichotomy. On the one hand, there are close relations among a considerable number of scholars and policymakers, and especially the emergence of "technopols" who move back and forth between academia and politics (e.g., Domínguez 1997). On the other hand, a much smaller number of scholars focus on theoretical issues without addressing explicit policy concerns, thus adhering to the pattern that characterizes most other subfields in Political Science. A third group, prominent in U.S. and in Canadian academia, shuns any involvement with policymakers but approaches the issues from a politically committed anti-establishment position.

Even though many scholars and practitioners in the field of Inter-American affairs have had considerable experience with each other, some scholars have become practitioners, and some practitioners have re-entered academia, the fruits of their interaction have on the whole not been substantial. Scholars have often been critical of U.S. and Canadian practitioners for their failure to rigorously disaggregate among country experiences; flawed policymaking by misleading analogy; and loose conceptualization of such processes as democracy promotion, populism, and the rule of law. Few social scientists, on the other hand, have been able and willing to apply rigorous analyses and methodologies to policy issues. Policy officials working on Inter-American affairs often lament the lack of policy relevance of academic theorizing. Scholars and practitioners in this field tend to talk past each other, with little impact in either direction.

This paper begins by exploring a number of success stories of scholar-practitioner interactions on issues pertaining to Inter-American affairs to demonstrate that the gap might not be as insurmountable as we often imagine. The paper also highlights some of the salient limits to effective relations between the worlds of ideas and policy. It then discusses the main transmission belts—both individual and institutional—through which scholarly outputs influence the different stages of policymaking. The paper closes by highlighting a number of "best practices" to enhance effective scholar-practitioner relations in inter-American affairs

⁵Prominent examples include Cynthia Arnson, Russell Crandall, Jorge Domínguez, Richard Feinberg, Albert Fishlow, William LeoGrande, Abraham Lowenthal, Robert Pastor, Michael Shifter, Peter Smith, and Julia Sweig, among others—scholars whose work dominates the reading lists of college courses on Inter-American relations without having very much impact upon the literature of the field of IR.

and beyond, including tying research to significant world events, synthesizing research findings into digestible components, developing relations of trust with allies in government, providing concrete policy recommendations based on rigorous research and cost-effectiveness analyses, and integrating practitioners into academic departments, among others.

Scholars, Practitioners, and Inter-American Relations: Some Success Stories

Ideas from academia can shape policy at all stages of public policymaking: the articulation, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policies.⁶ The political uses of expert knowledge are not limited to improving or modifying a given course of action. Scholarly outputs can also help legitimate the workings of an institution and substantiate particular policy positions while undermining others.

Framing the Issue and Setting the Agenda: The Cases of Border Management and Women in Development

The efforts in recent years by the United States and Mexico to develop collaborative border management and the work done by United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Women in Development (WID) office in the late 1970s to introduce gender considerations into development assistance policy suggest the key role expert knowledge can play in framing issues, setting agendas, and legitimating particular courses of action.

Through the concept of "collaborative border management"—a multipronged strategy that involves cooperative law enforcement, joint management of ports of entry, shared economic resources, and complementary economic development strategies—scholars have contributed to the construction of a border regime for Mexico and the United States. Academic "packaging" of the issue helped generate a good deal of sustained attention among policymakers and led to a presidential declaration on collaborative border management. Although scholars found that many of their ideas were already present in border management debates and, in some cases, were already being implemented, scholarly inputs helped assure that the needed resources kept flowing to the border region (Olson, Shirk, and Selee 2010; Lawson 2011).

Academic input was also important in framing and setting the agenda for the USAID work on WID in the late 1970s. Under the leadership of gifted political entrepreneur Arvonne Fraser, the WID office viewed academic research as essential to defining its mission and establishing objective expertise. Drawing upon research on women and politics in Latin America conducted during the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Chaney 1978, 1979), scholars helped to identify specific areas where a WID perspective or WID interventions could make a difference; assess the impact of foreign assistance on women; evaluate projects; and establish and guarding WID's turf. Influencing policy is not only about rigorous research aimed at solving specific policy problems. No less important, it is about framing a given issue to set the agenda on the matter and opening some of the conditions of possibility for political action (Jaquette 2011:3).⁷

⁶A great deal of methodological work needs to be done to define and measure "successful" scholarship influence on policy. This would be a crucial step forward not only in differentiating between a "successful" from an "unsuccessful" case of scholar-practitioner interactions but also in systematically analyzing the conditions under which research can be expected to influence policymaking effectively. Policymaking comprises the *articulation* of problems—through agenda setting or framing—as political problems, the *formulation* of policy in a specific course of action, policy *implementation*, and monitoring or policy *evaluation*.

⁷Currently, USAID's Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment office has programs in Latin America and the Caribbean to help unlock women's potential through education programs and by providing training opportunities to strengthen women's employability.

The concept of “collaborative border management” and the pioneering work done by the WID office at USAID illustrate how expert knowledge can help in the articulation of salient policy issues through agenda setting or the right framing of issues.

Formulating and Implementing Policy: Scholars and Economic Development and Anti-Poverty Strategies, Foreign Policies, the Summit of the Americas, and the Drug War in Mexico

The relevance of scholars in shaping the actual content and implementation of policies in the region is evident in the shaping of Chile’s economic development trajectory of that country’s foreign policy toward the United States; the design of Mexico’s anti-poverty program *Progresa/Oportunidades* and its diffusion to other countries in the region and around the world; and the impact of academic work on multilateral diplomacy and economic integration on the U.S. approach to free trade in the Western Hemisphere.

The dramatic growth of Chile’s economy over the past 20 years is often attributed to the quality of the country’s public policies, a product of rigorous academic analysis. During the last three decades, Chilean economic policy has been directed and implemented by PhD-trained economists, such as former Finance Ministers Alejandro Foxley and Andrés Velasco and current President Sebastián Piñera. Rather than maintaining the unilateral trade liberalization policy implemented by the military dictatorship (Díaz and Martínez 1996), with the advent of democracy Chile’s economists designed and implemented an unorthodox economic integration strategy based on bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. The presence of scholars in Chile’s government circles with an understanding of the U.S. domestic and foreign policy-making processes was crucial in the case of the Chile–United States Free Trade Agreement. At the same time as Chile was awaiting the agreement’s approval by the U.S. Congress, Chilean IR scholars were debating whether to use Chile’s position in the United Nations Security Council to support the United States-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Stressing the agreement’s importance for the Chilean economy, many voices within Chile warned that not supporting the U.S. invasion would severely damage the prospects for an agreement that, back in 1996, already got jammed in the U.S. Congress. But supporting the United States would have gone against the principles of multilateralism and support of international institutions that are at the core of Chile’s foreign policy. Armed with knowledge of the U.S. political system, Chilean officials rightly predicted that there would be no retaliation and opted to withhold support for the use of force by the United States and Great Britain (Heine 2011). The Chile–United States Free Trade Agreement entered into force in January 2004.

Scholarly research also shaped the design of *Progresa/Oportunidades* anti-poverty program in Mexico—the largest anti-poverty program in the country’s history and one of the most renowned conditional cash transfer (CCTs) programs in the world. Originally named *Progresa*, in 2002 the government changed its name to *Oportunidades*. Building off research on the links between food intake, nutrition, health, education, and poverty, *Oportunidades* aims to reduce current and future poverty by directly transferring cash to eligible poor families as long as co-responsibilities on the part of households are fulfilled (Levy 2006).⁸ In

⁸*Oportunidades* has three main components: education, nutrition, and health. The education component grants cash transfers based on school attendance; in-kind transfers of school supplies, which are sometimes given as an additional cash transfer; and scholarships for each year of high school that students complete that can be retrieved from their interest bearing account only if the student graduates by the age of 22. The nutrition and health components offer cash and in-kind transfers (nutritional supplements, vaccinations, preventative treatments, and so forth), based on regular visits to a health clinic and the mother and teenagers’ attendance at health talks. In 2007, a fourth component was added to provide beneficiaries with a subsidy for their electricity bills (Lustig 2012:2).

designing the program, research conducted at multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank established that avoiding leakages and negative incentives through target mechanisms was crucial. Such research also showed the importance of granting resources to women/mothers rather than men/fathers, as the former are proven to be more effective in building poor children's human capital than the latter. These two findings are key pillars of the program, which has increased post-primary school enrollment in rural areas by 24% and the demand for health services among *Progres/Oportunidades* beneficiaries [by] 67% (Levy 2006; Lustig 2012:6).

In addition, *Progres/Oportunidades* rapidly diffused to other countries and is helping transform how extreme poverty is tackled in the rest of the hemisphere and around the world. For example, both James Wolfensohn (former president of the World Bank) and Enrique Iglesias (former president of the Inter-American Development Bank) invited Economist Santiago Levy (*Progres/Oportunidades*' main intellectual architect) to meet with President Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva to discuss CCTs programs as an alternative approach to poverty reduction in Brazil. With the assistance of Brazilian scholars and scholars-cum-practitioners, Lula's government decided to combine different existing programs into one and *Bolsa Familia* was born. CCTs programs similar to *Progres/Oportunidades* (although some large scale and some small) have now diffused to most Latin American countries and other regions such as South Asia and Africa. In 1997, there were only three programs that would qualify as CCTs programs. By 2008, however, the number of countries implementing such programs grew to 28 (Teichman 2007; Valencia Lomelí 2008; Fiszbein, Schady, Ferreira, Grosh, Kelleher, Olinto, and Skoufias 2009; Sugiyama 2011; Lustig 2012). As Nora Lustig (2012) argues, scholars working in national governments, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and other institutions have been instrumental in diffusing the knowledge acquired through research and practical experience from one country to the other. Moreover, Sugiyama (2011) has found that "neighborhood effects" (i.e., the share of a country's neighbors that have adopted CCTs) and not domestic conditions (e.g., a president's ideology, state capacity, and domestic needs) are the single best predictor of CCTs adoption in Latin America.⁹ In short, scholars working in and outside government have diffused the *Progres/Oportunidades* experience beyond the Mexican context and helped create a new international consensus on the most efficient and effective way to fight extreme poverty in the Americas and around the globe.

The prospects of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which gained particular policy impulse in the Western Hemisphere in the early 1990s, had their roots, at least in the United States, in academia, and think tanks, themselves heavily influenced by scholarly research. The idea was first proposed by President George H. W. Bush as part of his Enterprise for the Americas Initiative—a hemispheric program that he projected would establish a free-trade zone stretching from Anchorage to Tierra del Fuego. During the Clinton administration, some in the United States recommended focusing on the Uruguay Round, while others advocated looking at Asia. At the same time, many Democrats were conflicted over pursuing more FTAs. During his tenure at the National Security Council, Richard Feinberg had the opportunity to suggest to Vice President Al Gore a broad consultation scheme aimed at identifying mutual interests in the region, ranging from the promotion of

⁹That Latin America countries with markedly different levels of economic development and state capacity have adopted CCTs programs largely based on *Progres/Oportunidades* with only minimal adaptations to local contexts, constitutes strong evidence of diffusion (Sugiyama 2011:265). That is, the widespread adoption of CCTs offers a clear example of policy diffusion, a prominent issue in recent debates within IR and comparative politics (see, for instance, Simmons and Elkins 2004; Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2008).

democracy—an idea that also preceded the Clinton administration—and good governance to the strengthening of multilateral procedures and institutions. The Summits of the Americas that came out of this initiative embodied many of the values long advocated by mainstream U.S. and Latin American scholars as well as the policy recommendations of the premier Washington-based think tank focusing on the region—the Inter-American Dialogue and its report *Convergence and Community: The Americas in 1993* (Feinberg 2011).¹⁰

The research conducted by the Latin American Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars shaped the Obama administration's decision to broaden the Mérida Initiative. Enacted in 2008 by the Bush administration, the Mérida Initiative is a security cooperation agreement between the governments of the United States, Mexico, and Central America through which the United States provides its southern neighbors with training, equipment, and intelligence to combat drug trafficking and organized crime. Taking advantage of the window of opportunity created by the transition to the Obama Presidency and by the outburst of drug-related violence south of the border, the Wilson Center brought together a taskforce of scholars and practitioners from the United States and Mexico to illuminate the challenges that practitioners in both countries will confront in the near future. The outcome of these meetings provided crucial inputs for what has come to be known as the “Beyond Mérida” strategy. Seeking a better balance between the program's “hard-side” security-related assistance and its “soft-side” rule of law, human rights, and development assistance components, in March 2010 the Obama and Calderón governments agreed to expand the Mérida Initiative to include institution-building components (Olson and Wilson 2010). Like its predecessor, the new strategy focuses on disrupting organized criminal groups and institutionalizing the rule of law. However, it introduces two additional pillars: on the one hand, building a twenty-first-century border through collaborative border management efforts that use technology to increase information sharing on illegal activities while at the same time facilitating legitimate commerce and travel between Mexico and the United States, and on the other hand, building strong resilient Mexican border communities by funding local government programs offering job training and treatment for drug addiction (Seelke and Finklea 2011). The exchanges that took place under the auspices of the Wilson Center together with others at the Pacific Council on International Policy and elsewhere contributed to developing and further cementing the broadening of the Mérida Initiative. Simultaneously to these meetings, the Center was also building sustained support for the taskforce's recommendations among members of Congress (Olson et al. 2010; Arnson 2011).

Evaluating Policy: The Cases of U.S. Democracy Promotion and Mexico's Progresas/Oportunidades Anti-Poverty Program

Scholars can also play an important role in evaluating the effects of specific policies and suggesting course corrections. This is illustrated by USAID's democracy promotion programs and Mexico's anti-poverty program, *Progresas/Oportunidades*.

In recent years, a sea change in the foreign-aid community appears to have taken place with regard to the importance of evaluations of program effectiveness. This policy shift was influenced by a USAID-funded consortium of researchers (from Vanderbilt University, the University of Pittsburgh, and the University of Virginia) who found that, in general, USAID democracy assistance programs were having a positive effect on democracy worldwide, and that their impact was

¹⁰To be sure, not all Latin America countries wanted the FTAA. As former Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs Luiz Felipe Lampreia stresses, Brazil wanted the FTAA dead from inception and work very hard to block it, using academic advice to help find a way to do just that (2009).

greater in poorer and more divided countries. The study was unable to determine the precise programs or specific contexts in which democracy promotion had worked well or failed. However, the contribution of this and other academic studies on the matter has been twofold: first, USAID now requires that the projects it funds gather baseline data to be assessed by external evaluators; second, governments now have a clear indicator upon which international assistance programs may be evaluated (Seligson 2011).¹¹

Mexico's *Progres/Oportunidades* anti-poverty program was inaugurated in 1997 during the period of PRI¹²-dominated politics. When opposition candidate Vicente Fox became president, "there were strong rumors that his newly appointed Minister of Social Development, Josefina Vázquez Mota, would replace *Progres* with a different, charity-based poverty alleviation program." However, *Progres* survived and it only lost its name to *Oportunidades*. "Fox's administration increased coverage from 2.3 to 4.2 million households" and the program also survived the transition from Vicente Fox to Felipe Calderón in 2006. In this respect, the role of the comprehensive and independent evaluation of *Progres* led by the Washington-based organization International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) was crucial. IFPRI's-led team of researchers (which included renowned scholars in the area of impact evaluation in universities and research centers) not only supplied a high-quality evaluation of the program but also helped improve its performance, giving it a political resiliency that has proven key at ensuring its continuity across different administrations.¹³

Thus, today not only has it been confirmed that some democracy promotion and anti-poverty programs do in fact have their desired effects, but also that standards of policy assessment are in place and the metrics upon which policymakers may decide in favor or against a given policy direction can be established.¹⁴

Three Different Uses of Expert Knowledge

Under the right circumstances, some scholars and their work have affected one or more of the four general stages of public policy decision-making processes—the articulation, formulation, implementation, and/or evaluation of a given policy. This discussion also suggests that the use of expert knowledge on the part of practitioners is not reducible to *instrumental* considerations aimed at modifying or altogether changing the substance of a given policy. Scholarly outputs may also provide a *legitimizing* function to policymaking—as expert knowledge can enhance an organization's legitimacy and potentially bolster its claim to resources or jurisdiction over a particular policy area, as in the case of the concept of "collaborative border management" between Mexico and the United States and that of the *Progres/Oportunidades* anti-poverty program in Mexico. Scholarly outputs may also have a *substantiating* function—as expert knowledge can help substantiate preferences over a given course of action while undermining that of political rivals, as reflected in the case of Chile's decision to oppose

¹¹The research findings on the effects of U.S. democracy promotion efforts were published in Finkel, Pérez-Liñan, and Seligson (2007) and in Azpuru, Finkel, Pérez-Liñan, and Seligson (2008).

¹²The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party) ruled Mexico for nearly 70 years until December 2001, when Vicente Fox became the first president elected from an opposition party, the PAN, Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party).

¹³This is a remarkable outcome. "Traditionally, Mexico's anti-poverty initiatives tended to disappear with the *sexenio* even when the incumbent and the incoming presidents came from the same party and much of the same technocracy remained in place" (Lustig 2012:5–7).

¹⁴This is also apparent, for example, in the work of scholars at the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. This group scholars, mostly economists, assess the effectiveness of development policies throughout Latin America, Africa, South Asia, and Europe, using randomized evaluations.

the U.S. invasion of Iraq while awaiting U.S. congressional approval for a free trade agreement.¹⁵

Not So Fast! Skepticism On and Limits to Scholar-Practitioner Relations

The influence of scholarly ideas on policymakers is contingent on factors beyond the control of scholars. These factors are usually related but not limited to the politicized and haphazard nature of public policy decision-making processes.

Do Actual Scholarly Contributions Influence Policy?

Scholarly contributions, if defined as findings published in leading academic journals, do not often directly affect policymaking. As discussed above, only in the case of USAID's democracy promotion efforts academic findings informed policymaking. Particularly in the fields of Comparative Politics and IR, actual scholarly contributions do not appear to systematically impact policy.¹⁶ Rather, it is "prescriptive ideas", for which there is no empirical evidence but that resonates within universities because the common layperson sees them as the right thing to do—for example, the issue of "responsibility to protect"¹⁷—that end up influencing policy. "Prescriptive ideas" are logical arguments about why they would provide better policy outcomes *vis-à-vis* other policies, but these ideas are not actually demonstrated by empirical evidence—whether a new idea would make the world safer or better cannot be empirically demonstrated *before* the policy is actually implemented (Krasner 2011). As a general rule, in academia, where scholars strive to "publish or perish" in leading journals, scholars do not care about what one another "think" about a certain issue; what matters is what can be shown through systematically collected empirical evidence.

Limits to Scholar-Practitioner Relations in Inter-American Affairs

The likelihood that scholarly ideas will influence the policy process may be inversely proportional to the politicization of the issue at play. U.S. policies on illegal drug trade, Cuba, and immigration, illustrate this paradox (Shifter 2011:2). There is widespread consensus in both academic and policy circles that U.S. policy is failing in these areas, but policymakers have not been receptive to new ideas from scholars aimed at addressing these failures.¹⁸

The complex nature of policy-making processes calls for "aligning-stars" in order for expert knowledge actually to influence policymaking. The outputs of policy-making processes depend on at least three streams and two factors that are only marginally, if at all, directly influenced by scholarly knowledge. The three policy streams flow relatively independently from each other and are as follows: (i) "problem recognition", or the process through which a given condition (e.g., lack of peace in the Middle East) is transformed into a national security problem of a given country; (ii) "policy alternatives", or the process through

¹⁵On the "instrumental", "legitimizing", and "substantiating" functions of expert knowledge, see Boswell (2009).

¹⁶In IR in particular, research shows that "few articles in top journals offer explicit policy advice" (Maliniak, Oakes, Peterson, and Tierney 2011:437).

¹⁷Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a norm or set of principles that defines sovereignty not as a privilege but as a responsibility. R2P focuses on preventing or halting four crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes.

¹⁸This could be a function of the political style and choices made at the highest political levels. In Canada's stable democratic regime, for example, these choices and styles vary dramatically from one government to the other. Top leaders widen or reduce the aperture through which ideas, analysis, and recommendation flow, both within government and in the connection with the academic and think tank worlds, given their own political preferences (Evans 2011).

which alternative courses of action are generated in academic *and* non-academic circles (e.g., bureaucracy *vs.* scholars working in think tanks, non-governmental organizations); and (iii) “politics”, or “the national mood, interest groups campaigns, and administrative or legislative turnover” that may or not provide a functional environment for the implementation of available policy alternatives. Added to these, the two main factors that could bring the streams together and open the “window of opportunity” for available policy alternatives to influence policy are individual efforts made by politicians or policy entrepreneurs, or crises such as 9/11. That is, policy-making processes are like “garbage cans” of decision making in which policy outcomes are the result of individual actors attaching available policy solutions to existing problems, whereas scholarly inputs are only one among five processes and factors that may facilitate or impede the influence of scholarly knowledge on practice (Krasner 2009:261).

Examples in Costa Rica, Mexico, and Argentina illustrate this point. During Oscar Arias’ presidency in Costa Rica, half the cabinet had PhD degrees, but given the dysfunctional institutional design of the state (i.e., legislative minorities hold substantial veto power over policymaking due to Congressional by laws), it was virtually impossible to bring about policy change.¹⁹ In Mexico, receptiveness of policymakers to scholarly ideas tends to fluctuate depending on who is occupying the presidency. Whereas a relatively close relationship between Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) governments and the *Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México* (ITAM) existed during the 1980s and 1990s, the Partido Acción Nacional’s (PAN) administration of Vicente Fox has had something of an anti-academic bent. However, during the PAN’s government of Felipe Calderón, there has been a significant interaction between scholars and policymakers, as well as a few scholars-cum-practitioners occupying top-level government positions (e.g., Alejandro Poiré as Secretary of the Interior and Rafael Fernández de Castro as Presidential Advisor for International Affairs).²⁰

Argentina’s foreign policy-making process has historically been highly centralized in the hands of a very few political actors, mainly the president. Scholars do not circulate in and out of government and academia, even though Argentine scholars tend to tackle the most pressing issues of Argentina’s international agenda (Russell 2011).

Indeed, and in sharp contrast to United States-based IR scholarship, Latin America’s research in IR has traditionally produced relevant and applicable policy knowledge in a language accessible to policymakers. The incentive structure of academia in the region has rewarded non-theoretical knowledge and theory has often been seen as irrelevant in light of the region’s pressing concerns. Whether scholar–practitioner interactions take place varies in different domestic and historical circumstances (Tickner 2011). For example, scholars have been influential in Chile’s foreign policy-making process, but not in Brazil, where Itamaraty—Brazil’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs—has not only dominated that

¹⁹This should not be taken to suggest that in Costa Rica and other Central American countries, there is a dormant scholarly community waiting to be consulted on issues of national interest. In Central American and other lower-income Latin American countries, rigor and reliance on empirical data is often missing. The region has had a long tradition of non-scientific and ideologically charged “social science” scholarship. All other things being equal, in the absence of professional scholars, academia will continue to have a difficult time influencing policy (Casas-Zamora 2011).

²⁰Overall, however, the impact of scholarly work on policy in Mexico has been limited by the scarce amount of expert knowledge in many key issue areas (e.g., security and justice), as well as by the relative lack of effective dissemination strategies of such knowledge on the part of scholars (Heredia 2012).

country's foreign policy decision-making apparatus but also the production of Brazilian IR scholarship (De Souza 2011).²¹

The ability of scholarship to influence policy also depends on the pace at which policymaking takes place in different issue areas. The potential for scholarly influence is limited in policy areas with short time horizons, as in the case of day-to-day diplomacy. It is greater in areas with long-term horizons, such as development policy, where scholars have successfully introduced new ideas aimed at empowering women and reducing extreme poverty, as discussed above (Heredia 2012; Lustig 2012).

Moreover, the success of scholars at influencing policy depends greatly on context and timing. Scholarly influence increases when political leaders develop a hunger for new ideas either because old ideas have stopped working—such as during crises periods—or during periods marked by rapid and uncertain changes—such as in the case of the democratic transitions in South America in the early 1980s. These “windows of opportunities” in decision making compel political leaders to “rethink everything,” making them particularly receptive to new ideas. New policy issues and newly created government agencies are more likely to successfully exploit these windows of opportunity. Thus, it is up to the scholar, acting as a norm entrepreneur (Biersteker 2011), to identify and take advantage of these fleeting opportunities.

Scholarly success in influencing policymaking also depends on the existence of receptive allies within government institutions—what Rafael Fernández de Castro calls “brokers”—that are willing to advance policy recommendations based on sound scholarly research (Fernández de Castro 2011:6). However, not all efforts at effectively influencing policy are reducible to nurturing relations with government “brokers”. The United States was well on its way to creating the FTAA when countries like Brazil blocked the path. In this case, the United States let the moment pass, while other Latin American countries, such as Argentina, turned their back to the FTAA as soon as free trade-friendly governments left office, strengthening the position of the already ambiguous Brazilians. Thus, government “brokers” are important, but timing is also a factor that may facilitate or impede the effective influence of scholarly outputs on policy (Feinberg 2011).

Communicating the fruits of rigorous and policy-relevant research in “user-friendly” ways presents another challenge for scholars seeking to influence policy. Scholars, in general, are trained to write for peers interested in theory development, rather than for practitioners, interested in absorbing jargon-free policy recommendations based on rigorous diagnoses. Practitioners have no time to read books and articles written for a scholarly audience that require readers to immerse themselves in academic debates.

To be sure, scholarly influence on policy is a two-way street—practitioners must also be willing to listen to scholars and respect the value of their work. However, practitioners' likelihood of paying attention to expert knowledge appears to be tied to issue-specific perceptions. For instance, the success of economists in influencing policy can be explained by the widespread perception that economic policymaking requires technical knowledge. There is no similar consensus behind the idea that technical knowledge is needed for crafting foreign policy, for example. This is certainly the case in the area of citizen security, where “no one” assumes that technical knowledge is a prerequisite for speaking about the issue (Casas-Zamora 2011).

²¹It should be noted, however, that there is some evidence suggesting that on issues such as trade, Brazil's foreign policy-making process has been “incrementally democratized”—that is, increasingly penetrated by civil society actors interested in making trade policy outcomes more public-regarding (Armijo and Kearney 2008).

Another major challenge to establishing sustainable scholar–practitioner interactions is the shrinking of resources available for bridging this divide. International funders such as the Ford and Hewlett Foundations are no longer interested in playing the crucial role they had during the 1980s and part of the 1990s in funding research projects in the region (Arnson 2011). Moreover, the increasingly polarized political climate in Washington affects the type of projects that obtain funding. To secure funds, scholars may have to become more partisan and strident. Funding is increasingly geared toward results that will support one or another side of a debate. There is a real danger that in trying to influence policy, scholars and think tanks may end up having to compromise objectivity (Suro 2011).

Transmission Belts: Individual and Institutional

There are three main mechanisms through which scholarly outputs influence policy. First, the trickle-down model “assumes that new ideas emerge from academic “ivory towers”, gradually filter down into the work of applied analysts (and especially people working in public policy think tanks), and finally reach the perceptions and actions of policy makers” (Walt 2005:40–41). Second, given the time pressures that policymakers must decide and act upon, the “intellectual capital” of scholars-cum-practitioners is useful in the making of policy (Nye 2008a:656–657). Third, think tanks and university-based research centers have come to offer relatively well-institutionalized transmission belts along which policy-relevant knowledge is effectively conveyed; this is particularly true in the United States (Wilson 2007). All these suggest that the situation between academia and policymaking may not be as dire as proponents of the putative “gap” may imply.

The Trickling-Down of Ideas and Embedded Intellectual Capital of “In-and-Outers”

On issues ranging from the economy to foreign policymaking, academic influence can be understood by the way some scholarly ideas “trickled-down” to decision-making processes, and, alternately, by how ideas are translated into policy through the “embedded intellectual capital” of scholars-cum-practitioners.

The Chicago Boys’ influence over Chile’s economic trajectory under the Pinochet dictatorship is an expression of the “trickle-down model” at work.²² These scholars prepared themselves in an “ivory tower” with no links to government. Indeed, there was little expectation that they would directly affect policy, as what they proposed was simply too divergent from the dominant import substitution industrialization model then favored by Chilean policymakers. However, following Pinochet’s coup, the Chicago Boys were given an unprecedented opportunity to be practitioners in an environment where they were not beholden to civil society—conditions that facilitated the systematic filtering down of ideas to the policy process (Muñoz 2011; Valdés 2011). While this could be assessed as a rather extreme example of scholarly ideas influencing policy, the episode was not unique. Respected scholars such as Alejandro Foxley, Ricardo French-Davis and, more recently, Andrés Velasco served under Chile’s *Concertación* administrations (1990–2010) and systematically impacted democratic Chile’s economic trajectory.

Through the “embedded intellectual capital of in-and-outers” Latin American scholars also influenced regional international relations. A key contribution to Chile’s effort to rejoin the Latin American community of nations after the return

²²The “Chicago Boys, as the military regime’s economists were called because a number of them had received their training at the University of Chicago, were devoted to dismantling the state and justified authoritarianism to do so” (Giraldo 1997 :232; see also Valdés 1995).

of democracy was facilitated by the work of a regional academic network of IR scholars known as *Relaciones Internacionales de América Latina* (RIAL).²³ Important links were created between the Chilean scholars who participated in RIAL and their colleagues in the region, many of whom (Rodrigo Pardo of Colombia, Eduardo Ferrero-Costa of Perú, Rosario Green of Mexico, Celso Lafer of Brazil, and Dante Caputo of Argentina) later became Foreign Ministers, cementing much of the subsequent political cooperation in the region, and facilitating Chile's complex reinsertion in the world after being considered a pariah country by the international community during the Pinochet years (Heine 2011; Muñoz 2011).

The "embedded intellectual capital" of scholars-cum-practitioners also has been a crucial part in Mexico's *Progresos/Oportunidades* anti-poverty program because the practitioners who had a key role in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the program had been scholars themselves. All scholars-cum-practitioners involved in *Progresos/Oportunidades* "shared a solid academic background, a high regard for scholarly work and a genuine concern for making anti-poverty programs effective" (Lustig 2012:7–8). Even President Zedillo, a staunch supporter of the program, at the time of its launch, holds a PhD in Economics from Yale and worked as a researcher at the Bank of Mexico.

Think Tanks, University-Based Research Centers, and the Institutionalization of Scholar-Practitioner Relations in Inter-American Affairs (and Beyond)

While think tanks may have a limited direct effect over policy decisions, particularly when compared to powerful lobbies and interest groups, they do play an important role in framing the terms of policy debates (Arnson 2011; Shifter 2011). Through think tanks, scholars can define the terms of a policy debate and even bring attention to issues that were previously off the agenda—as the role occupied, as discussed above, by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in broadening and securing sustained support for the Mérida Initiative to dealing with Mexico's drug violence. Moreover, research conducted in think tanks may also find a strong resonance in other parts of the world. For example, the Wilson Center hosted a conference on democratic transitions in the 1980s which led to the eventual publication of O'Donnell and Schmitter's four volumes on *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. These volumes, especially the "green book" coauthored by O'Donnell and Schmitter as the project's concluding volume, influenced the strategies of democracy advocates from South America to South Africa. Information technology innovations allow think tanks to instantaneously publicize and even directly broadcast their activities around the globe—as was the case, for example, with the Chilean Foreign Ministry following the Wilson Center's conference on Peru's recent presidential election via the Internet (Arnson 2011).

The United States-based think tanks have also been critical in shaping some policymakers' understandings of how people in the region view the United States and reconciling that with how U.S. policymakers view themselves, as well as in advancing understanding of the complexity of borders and anti-narcotics issues, and regarding what democracy is and is not. Ideas do percolate through academic circles, are teased out, and presented in coherent manners through the work done at think tanks, and these insights, in turn, help shape better policies (Shifter 2011:3). A good example was the Inter-American Dialogue's report

²³For 15 years, with funding from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the Ford Foundation, RIAL brought together International Relations specialists from all over the region and elsewhere for annual conferences, published some 90 books, and managed to establish and keep alive the field of IR in the region.

Convergence and Community: The Americas in 1993, discussed above, that helped shape the U.S. approach to multilateral summitry.

In Latin America, the quality of policies stands to be improved by the spread of think tanks. For reasons that remain unclear, insufficient funding and the business class's reluctance to engage in philanthropy constitute major obstacles to the founding of think tanks across the region, particularly in Mexico (Heredia 2012). Canada faces a similar situation, albeit, presumably, for different reasons. In Canada, there are only "very few private research institutes or think tanks [and] it's the universities that, for better or worse, are the repositories of expertise and ideas outside government" (Evans 2006:2).

University-based research centers, on their part, possess several distinct advantages over think tanks. In a university setting, for example, scholars can use these forums to propose alternative policy ideas that may not achieve resonance when presented within the context of a think tank. Research centers can also serve a convening function and bring together groups of people that would otherwise not interact. The experience of Brown's Watson Institute for International Studies is telling in this respect. The Institute has organized conferences bringing together policymakers, academics, leaders of Non-Governmental Organizations, filmmakers, computer scientists, and military personnel. This has helped in the creation of genuine multidisciplinary "transnational policy networks" (TPN)—groups of individuals who share a common expertise, technical language, and broadly defined normative concerns, but do not necessarily agree on specific policy alternatives, that seek to assist in building capacity for influencing policy from outside government. For example, the Watson Institute trained new members of the United Nations Security Council on the use of international sanctions and country officials from developing countries on environmental policy drawing upon the work of a TPN (Biersteker 2011). That is, university-based research centers also allow scholars to gain an understanding of the type of knowledge practitioners require and may even create opportunities for involving practitioners in the design of research on those topics.

"Best Practices" in Scholar–Practitioner Relations

In dealing with some of the salient problems precluding sustained and effective interactions between the worlds of ideas and policy, a number of "best practices" can be identified in thinking about how scholar–practitioner interactions might be enhanced (see Table 1).²⁴

From a practitioner's perspective, the work of scholars tends to be disregarded because it often seems that university professors are increasingly "withdrawing... behind a curtain of theory and models" that only insiders can penetrate and have virtually nothing to offer to meet the needs of policymakers. Scholars are often assumed to be ill-disposed, or even ill-equipped, to address the immediate challenges policymakers must face on a daily basis (Newsom 1996:138; Leggold and Nincic 2001:203; Anderson 2003:2).²⁵

From the perspective of scholars, the different fields comprising the social sciences are self-regulated—professional success depends almost entirely on one's reputation among peers (Anderson 2003; Walt 2005). There is a strong incentive to produce highly specialized and methodologically rigorous research aimed at offering general propositions because this is what most scholars want to do. Policy-relevant work is not much valued, if at all, in tenure decisions

²⁴We thank Richard Snyder for encouraging us to synthesize the following discussion in the accompanying table.

²⁵Other plausible reasons why academic research may fail to influence policy might include misinterpretation, distortions, and politicization of expert social science knowledge on the part of policymakers.

(Marshall and Rothgeb 2011). Hence, even though research often addresses the “*so what?*” question, the incentives for scholars are related to generating novel arguments that will impress other scholars, rather than policymakers. Future scholars are trained to train other future scholars, at the expense of developing and honing skills, such as writing memos, that would allow more sustained and effective interactions between the academic and policy worlds. In this sense, as Latin American universities appear to emulate the incentive structure of U.S. institutions (Russell 2011), scholars in the region may be less likely to engage in policy-relevant work as has been traditionally the case in Latin America.

In dealing with this situation, there are a number of “best practices” for effectively inserting academic findings into the policy process:

- (a) *Producing “usable knowledge”*—policy-applicable knowledge that, through *description, explanation, and prescriptions*, can respond to the needs of policymakers to know *what* is going on and *what* causes produce outcomes of interest.²⁶
- (b) *Tying research to significant world events*—such as upcoming presidential summits—to gain the attention of policymakers.
- (c) *Convening meetings and drafting reports*, including independent reports that summarize policy options that are already floating around and, when possible, offer alternative courses of action. Having scholar–practitioner meetings sponsored by government agencies could be crucial at attracting the attention of policymakers, since under such circumstances these are more likely to be invested in the results scholars produce.²⁷
- (d) *Synthesizing research findings into digestible components*. Scholars should address explicitly three questions in the introduction to their work. *What is the study about? What are the principal findings? And, what practical difference do the findings make?* It would be a tremendous leap forward if policymakers had access to brief memos that answered these three questions regarding existing research findings.
- (e) *Developing relations of trust with allies in government*. Doing so would help scholarly outputs influence policy. It would increase the likelihood that scholars will generate research insights that policymakers would use because scholars develop a sense of empathy for the day-to-day challenges policymakers face. And, it would open practitioners to advice from scholars with whom they have a regular working relationship because practitioners better understand what could be gained from rigorous research if some policy issues were to be analyzed by the right group of scholars (Biersteker 2011).
- (f) *Participating in government* for a year or two, as this could help improve both research and teaching. Scholars can gain important insights on the pressures under which practitioners find themselves on a daily basis, while students crave real-world application of otherwise abstract ideas (Andreas 2011).
- (g) *Providing concrete policy recommendations based on rigorous research and cost-effectiveness analyses* (Lawson 2011). Scholars must not abandon their main function—producing knowledge based on replicable research

²⁶See George and Bennett (2005:269–279) for an excellent introductory discussion.

²⁷Scholar–practitioner meetings are also functional to participating directly in transnational policy networks including former practitioners that are brought into the design of scholarly research; hosting research briefings for public audiences as well as closed research briefings with government officials; holding training workshops for practitioners on issues such as extreme poverty alleviation, the effects of democracy promotion programs, and the use of international financial sanctions; and for conducting simulated exercises on policymaking; among other goals (Biersteker 2011).

designs (e.g., randomized experiments), testable hypotheses, and supported by robust empirical findings. It is crucial for scholars and epistemic communities alike to be organized around knowledge rather than upon official connections, as they may lose their willingness and capacity to challenge officially sanctioned courses of action for fear of losing access to the policy process.²⁸

- (h) *Integrating practitioners into academic departments* to help understand and exploit the added value that scholars' work can bring to the policymaking process (Shannon 2010). This could be achieved, for instance, by inviting resident Foreign Service Officers at U.S. universities (today primarily serving as local representatives and recruiters for the State Department) to actively participate in Working Papers meetings.

TABLE 1. Scholar-Practitioner Relations: Toward "Best Practices"

<i>Problems</i>	<i>The gap</i>	<i>Best practices</i>
Scholars		
"Publish or perish" with other scholars in mind only, not practitioners	Scholars are not interested in producing knowledge deemed useful by the policy community	Pursue "usable knowledge" and write clearly: <i>What is the study about? What are its principal findings? What practical differences do the findings make?</i>
Future scholars are only taught how to train other future scholars		Convene scholar-practitioner meetings (preferably funded by government) to present policy-relevant scholarly outputs and build professional ties between scholars and policymakers (among other goals)
Department Chairs do not reward "publicly engaged scholarship"		Ocasional and temporary participation by scholars in the policy world may help improve research and teaching
Practitioners		
Disregard scholarly outputs as altogether policy-irrelevant	Practitioners complain that scholarly work is increasingly irrelevant to the conduct of statecraft	Reach out the scholarly community more systematically to identify strategic situations, to explore outcomes worth pursuing, or to identify policy options for achieving them (expert knowledge has an <i>instrumental, legitimizing, and substantiating</i> function in policymaking)
Politicization, distortions, and misinterpretation of expert knowledge (?)		Redefine the role of public officials in University residency to help understand and exploit the added value that scholars' work can bring to policymaking processes Rely on rigorous methods (e.g. randomized experiments and cost-effectiveness analysis) to evaluate the actual effects of policy

²⁸This is known to take place, for example, with many Asian scholars working on regional bodies (Acharya 2011).

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