

Educating the next generation of global leaders: Are we missing something?

Abstract

This research aims to gauge the state of LSE's IR education vis-à-vis its integration of climate and environment discussions and explore the impact of such integration.

Using a methodology comprising of four strands – secondary research, textual analysis, an online closed-question survey and open-question interviews– the goal of this study is to synthesize quantitative and qualitative evidence to illustrate (1) the level of LSE's IR syllabi's integration with environment and climate topics; and (2) LSE's IR student and staff perspectives on this level of integration.

Ultimately this research presents evidence to argue why, when environment and climate disruption is *already* commanding so much of world politics (Busby, 2018), addressing these types of issues should matter to LSE.

This study finds that 2019/2020 IR courses have a 4.5% integration level with environment and climate topics, roughly mirroring the wider IR discipline's integration with these topics (Pereira, 2017). This finding does not sit well with the fact IR academics - inside LSE and widely – increasingly believe environmental matters hold a strong, core position within international relations policy and theory.

Furthermore, this research finds the majority of LSE students studying IR to hold this view too and are “very interested” in seeing greater discussion of environmental matters integrated into their courses.

As a globally leading university in IR, it could be of significant value for LSE's IR department to consider investing more in motivating research and study related to the climate and environment. Such an investment seems even more pertinent given some of LSE's 'competitors' are now adapting and updating their IR departments in view of today's climate and environment challenges.

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PART 1 Introduction

As a project born from LSE's 2030 Strategy, this research explores how 'fit for the future' LSE's IR department is. In the past couple of years there has been much debate - in LSE and other universities - about the need for syllabi to reflect greater heterogeneity in terms of race and gender. Worldwide civil-society movements are largely attributable to such discussions, as they make a call to 'decolonize the university', encourage curricula diversity and question historic boundaries. Much pressure has been subsequently levied on academic staff, with the recognition that course schedules shape, to a great extent, a student's understanding of a discipline: "IR syllabi form students' perceptions of what (the study of) 'International Relations' is" (Phull et al, 2019: 398).

However, it appears minimal-zero of this momentum for reform is currently geared towards greater environmental integration. Interestingly, this remains the case despite evidence from this research and elsewhere (e.g. University of Leicester, 2017) that student demand for climate and environment education has been increasing over time, with an acceleration of interest in the past three or so years.

Environmental issues are fundamentally political in kind, inextricably tied to people's ideologies and struggle for power (Haas et al, 1993). By definition, our age of the Anthropocene is one of messy, non-linear relationships

between nature and humanity, natural sciences and social sciences. Taking a macro-lens to political responses surrounding climate and environment, we can see the resources of international fora, states and non-state actors have become increasingly intertwined with 'saving the planet'. Which groups are prioritized in terms of receiving insulation or compensation from environmental degradation is a core IR concern, steeped in colonial issues and racialized and gendered oppressions (Yoshida, 2019).

This research uses a mixed-method research approach - secondary research, textual analysis, an online closed-question survey and open-question interviews - to address two questions:

Question 1: To what extent is LSE's International Relations (IR) department integrating climate and environment education?

Question 2: Does it matter if climate and environment discussions aren't happening in the LSE?

PART 2 Setting the Research Context

(I) Literature Review & Analysis

"IR is losing its theoretical innovativeness because of professional incentives to churn out publications." *Colgan, 2016: 487*

What similar research exists?

It appears no published article or research available online has specifically measured the extent to which tertiary-level IR reading lists integrate climate and environment topics, in any university.

Colgan in 2016 did undertake a research study on 42 US universities' core IR modules, analysing 42 reading lists totaling 3,343 (2,069 unique) data pieces. However, this study was solely focused on PhD reading material and did not seek to textually analyse the data piece titles and publishing journal; the focus of analysis was on the publishing journal only to establish a measure of student 'exposure' to the diversity of IR research. The extent to which certain issue areas were covered by university syllabi were not of significant interest, though Colgan did mention that no articles from the *Global Environmental Politics* journal – or any other environmentally-focused IR journal – had been included in any of these readings lists.

Building on this research, Green and Hale (2017) mention in their footnotes that they corresponded with Colgan and understood that when one did search Colgan's reading list titles and publishing journal for certain environmentally-related terms - "environment, pollution, ozone, climate, green" - only 13 of the 2,069 unique readings were matched (Green and Hale, 2017:478).

My research draws a lot of methodological practice from Phull et al (2019)'s "Gender and bias in the International Relations curriculum: Insights from reading lists" which analyses 43 IR reading lists from LSE to measure the extent to which female authorship has been represented. This comparison is more fully developed in **Part 3 (I)**.

What supply of IR and climate and environment scholarship exists?

Looking at the top IR journal articles published in the last decade, it is estimated that articles integrating environment-related topics occupy an estimated 4-5% of total articles (Pereira, 2017). Among those IR scholars working in the environment arena, there is a strong shared belief that the topic occupies a peripheral position within the discipline (Simangan, 2020) – despite IR being "the obvious home for considering how humanity (divided as it is) deals with the challenges of sharing a singular and finite space" (Cory and Stevenson, 2018:13).

However, when it comes to IR and climate change research, "in recent years there has been an explosion" and "the quantity of publications related... continues to increase dramatically" (Cass, 2017:4). Hence any "recent surge in environment-related research is focused almost exclusively on climate change" (Green and Hale, 2017:474).

Green and Hale (2017) contextualize the meagre supply of environment-related scholarship in evidence illustrating a disconnect between the importance IR professors levy on environment as an international policy issue and the number of IR professors researching the environment. Using 2016 Teaching, Research and International Policy (TRIPS) data, they report that over half of all US-based IR scholars surveyed ranked global climate change among the top three most important policy issues currently facing the US. Yet, only 3.2% of IR scholars identify the environment as their primary area of research.

Interestingly, as seen in **Part 3 (III)**, Green and Hale's finding mirrors the disconnect found in my research between how important LSE IR teaching staff believe environmental matters are to the field, and the extent to

which LSE IR teaching staff integrate environmental matters into course content and departmental research initiatives.

Why is there an underrepresentation of environmental politics in IR?

A strong feeling has developed over the past few years amidst some IR scholars - such as Aggarwal, Mearsheimer and Walt - that "IR is losing its theoretical innovativeness because of professional incentives to churn out publications" (Colgan, 2016: 487). Keohane deplors IR's "synthetic interpretation of change" in the context of energy and environmental developments that have struck world politics over the couple of decades (ibid). Orsini et al (2019) believe that a central hindrance to the discipline's understanding of such phenomena is IR's dogged focus on rational, "linear thinking that emphasises centralised authority and prediction" which is wholly unsuitable for the messy, interdependent, complex systems which underpin global order (Orsini et al, 2019:2).

Two other structural factors, specific to the underrepresentation of environmental politics in IR, have been flagged by Green and Hale (2017:475). Firstly – as this research and Colgan's research noted above indicates – "global environmental politics (GEP) is generally not taught to graduate students". Hence, the environment in IR is understood to be facing a vicious cycle of disciplinary exclusion.

Secondly, GEP scholars – when compared to the average IR scholar – are disproportionately women. "Given that women publish less than men in the top IR journals—comprising only 15.6% of first authors and 19.5% of authors overall—it is reasonable to infer that the larger proportion of women in GEP could explain lower rates of environment-related publications." However, it cannot be ascertained "whether it is bias against women that restricts GEP or bias against GEP that restricts women, but the two dynamics very well may reinforce one another" (ibid).

(II) Review of Other Universities' IR Syllabi

"No matter whether you join the world of diplomacy, the public sector, business or academia ... you will be facing growing demands and requests to face and deal with difficult questions and emergencies stemming from the climate and environmental challenges." *The Fletcher School, Tufts University (2019)*

Using prospectus information made publicly available online, it appears universities world-leading in teaching IR have already made significant investments in integrating their IR departments with climate and environment related matters¹. Below are a handful of examples:

Warwick:

- Three out of the five core research themes in the Comparative Politics research cluster (in the Politics and International Studies department) are environmentally related: (1) Theories of justice and equality applied to the environment, education and international finance (2) Environmental policy, including the relationship between trade and the environment, agriculture and the environment (3) The politics of sustainability.
- In Warwick's International Political Economy research cluster, The Annual Debate on the Future of IPE in 2020 is on 'Climate Change: Power, Resistance, and Change'. The purpose of the 2020 debate is to consider what sorts of contributions IPE can make to understanding the politics of climate change mitigation.
- In their International Relations and Security research cluster, a prominent and explicit recognition is made to climate change and the distribution of resources as contemporary, necessary variables to include in security analysis.

Stanford:

- The Ford Dorsey Program in International Policy recently redesigned its curriculum for 2018-2019. This MA restructure was to focus on five central facets of IR they felt had become of greater pertinence with "energy, natural resources, and the environment" becoming one of those facets.

Tufts:

- Under the Fletcher School (Tuft's graduate school for International Affairs), the Center for International Environment and Resource Policy produces research and teaching which puts contemporary environmental and resource challenges at the forefront to provide empirical evidence for academics and

¹ Universities researched: Harvard, Princeton Sciences Po, Oxford (the top 4, in order, universities in Politics & International studies, as ranked by QS Top Universities 2020; LSE is ranked 5th) Cambridge, Warwick, Stanford, Yale, Georgetown, John Hopkins, Columbia, Tufts.

policy makers, in a comprehensive trans-disciplinary approach (science, economics, politics, law and engineering).

Columbia:

- The School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University has launched the Kent Global Leadership Program on Conflict Resolution this summer, specifically to address complex system challenges in contemporary conflict, with environmental and resource factors constituting core analytical facets of the program.

PART 3: Methods & Findings

(I) Reading List Content Analysis

4.5% of LSE's 2019-2020 IR readings across undergraduate and postgraduate courses are significantly related to environmental matters.

I measure the state of LSE's taught IR education in relation to climate and environment integration by identifying the proportion of reading lists² from all available 2019-2020 (undergraduate and postgraduate) modules³ which are significantly related to environmental matters. Proxying article content with article title plus the article's publishing journal name, I use Excel's "IF" function to perform reading list content analysis. I identify all data pieces which contain the following words in article title or the article's journal name: environment, green, climate, sustainable, sustainability, renewable, biodiversity, biodiverse, biosafety, emission, ecosystem, ecology, deforest.

My original data set comprises a total of 67 courses (33 undergraduate, 34 postgraduate) which together produce 16,655 readings assigned as Essential (3,386) or Background (13,269) reading material.

There is a great deal of methodological similarity between this research and Phull et al (2019)'s research on gender bias in IR curriculum. Our unit of analysis (single assigned item from LSE IR reading lists⁴) and material source (Moodle) are the same. Moreover, our data sets similarly provide a snapshot of the full IR curriculum rather than its development over time, indicating what students are facing today.

Apart from the obvious difference (searching for environmental marginalisation vs gender marginalisation) it is worth mentioning other related differences exist between the studies, such as which variables of have been of prime interest for coding (e.g. titles, data added vs author gender, convener gender) as well as the coding technique itself (manual vs. textual analysis in Excel).

I find that 757 readings in total - 4.5% of IR readings across undergraduate and postgraduate courses - are significantly related to environmental matters. As similarly found by Phull et al (2019)'s study of LSE's IR readings, texts from traditional scholars – “disciplinary heavyweights” – dominate. Only one author from this influential group of IR academics – Robert Keohane – writes about environmental issues (Pereira, 2017). This may explain why 1st and 2nd year undergraduates, who will be laying foundations of canonical IR, have less than 3% of readings dedicated to environmental discussion [see [Figure 1](#)].

Background readings lists for 3rd year undergraduate and postgraduates contain the largest proportion of environmentally-related readings at 6.9% and 4.6% respectively, benefitting from the reading material supply of IR367 and IR467 – the 2/67 IR courses dedicated to studying the IR and the environment.

At the individual module level, we can see that 28 courses (42% of total courses) do not contain any environmentally-related readings in either Essential or Background lists. This figure rises to 67% when we measure all of those courses that contain 0-2% of environmentally-related readings in both Essential and Background lists.

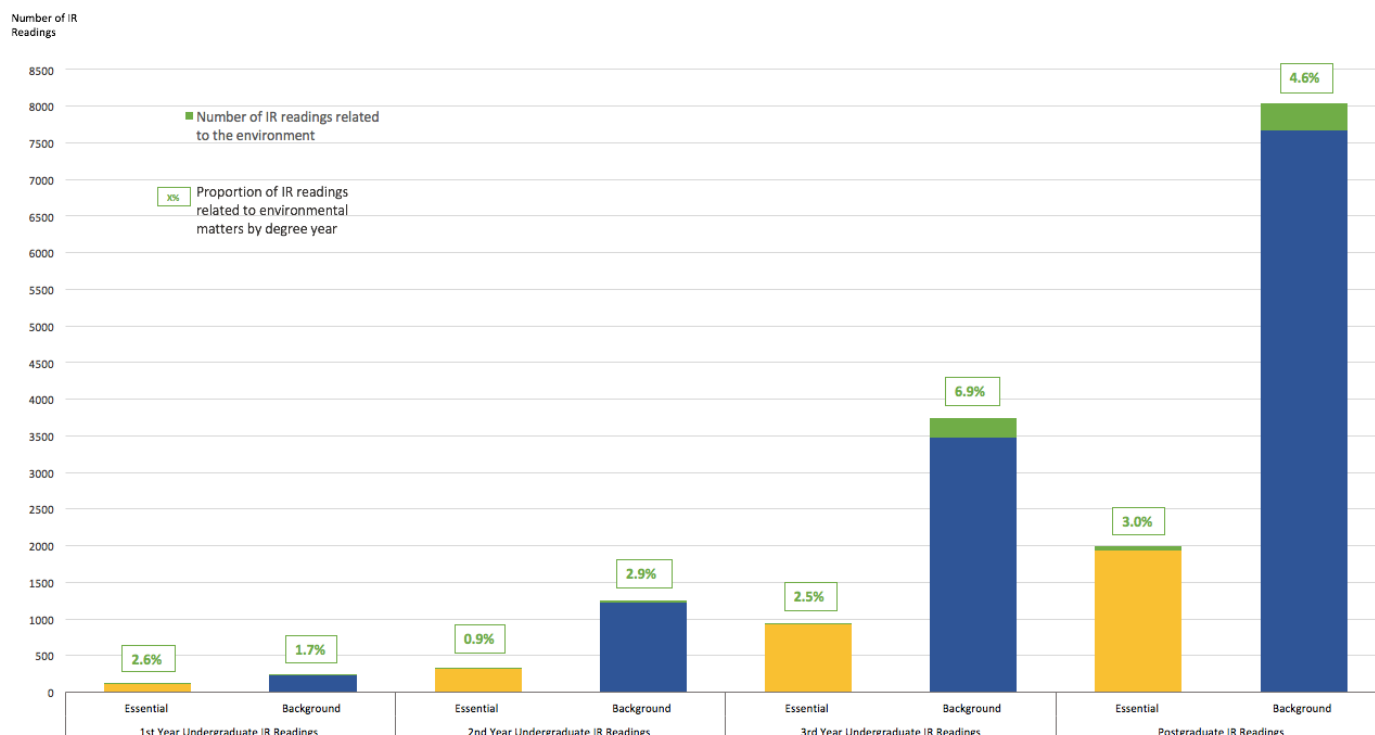
Those courses that have relatively high integration of environmental readings, aside from IR367 and IR467, are IR452 Empire and Conflict in World Politics (30%, Essential); IR429 Economic Diplomacy (13%, averaging Essential and Background); IR468 The Political Economy of Trade (12%, Background) and IR462 International Political Theory (9% averaging Essential and Background).

² Reading lists are used to proxy syllabi content because course summaries and week-by-week course structures are more superficial indicators of the content than reading lists. Furthermore, these documents were not available to download for every course.

³ Research student courses were not included as there is only one course available 2019-2020.

⁴ A reading which could have been assigned more than once in a course (i.e. different book chapters from the same author) is calculated in this study as separate reading list items.

FIGURE 1: Proportion of IR Readings Related to Environmental Matters



I also wanted to see if there had been a temporal evolution of IR readings lists in light of the following external developments over the past decade:

- (i) Increased public attention on and knowledge of climate and environment issues (YouGov, 2019)
- (ii) Increased student interest in learning about climate and environment issues [see Part 3 (III)] (University of Leicester, 2017)
- (iii) Increased supply of IR and climate research [see Part 2 (I)]

Have these developments translated into a positive relationship between the year that a reading was added to reading list and the proportion of readings added which are environmentally related? Have professors, when they came to adding more materials to their readings lists, been adding more environmentally-related materials as a proportion of the total over time perhaps spurred (consciously or unconsciously) these external developments?

Each of my 16,655 data points are additionally identified by 'Year Added' from 2013-2019, hence I have been able to calculate the statistical linear correlation between the two variables 'Year Added' and 'Proportion of Readings Added with Environmental Significance'. I make this calculation using Pearson's correlation coefficient which gives us an "r" value between +1 and -1. 1 shows a total positive linear correlation, 0 shows no linear correlation and -1 shows a total negative linear correlation.

Disaggregating the data by year of study and Background vs Essential reading list, I calculate 6 correlation coefficients to see if the year in which reading lists were refreshed had any bearing on how many would be related to the environment [See Figure 2].

FIGURE 2: Correlation coefficient between Year Added and Proportion of Readings Added with Environmental Significance

ALL ESSENTIAL READINGS		ALL BACKGROUND READINGS	
correlation coefficient (r)	-0,095652816	correlation coefficient (r)	0,090452087
UNDERGRADUATE ESSENTIAL READINGS		UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND READINGS	
correlation coefficient (r)	0,095534268	correlation coefficient (r)	0,149736353
POSTGRADUATE ESSENTIAL READINGS		POSTGRADUATE BACKGROUND READINGS	
correlation coefficient (r)	-0,208959046	correlation coefficient (r)	0,071449355

Each of the six “r” values in **Figure 2** show an insignificant relationship ($-0.25 > r > 0.25$) between the two variables (‘Year Added’ and ‘Proportion of Readings Added with Environmental Significance’) exists. Hence it would appear that greater public awareness of environmental issues, greater student interest in environmental issues, nor greater IR research in climate has had any significant impact on the level of environmental integration in IR courses.

Reflections on methodology:

Reading list content analysis. This study has used reading list articles’ title plus journal name as a proxy for article content. However, there may have been instances where this proxy fails to be fully representative. For example, this study may be missing important search terms (e.g. ‘anthropocene’, ‘geological’, ‘earth’) to indicate an environmental focus and includes search terms (e.g. ‘environment’) which have alternative meanings outside of environmental relevance.

As an additional but separate matter, it could have been of use to break up my search terms and gather statistics on them independently. This way I could verify, out of the environmental integration occurring, what kind of environmental issues are most prominently explored in IR syllabi. For example, from my literature review research [see **Part 2 (I)**] there is evidence to suggest climate change is, by a long way, the most prominent environmental issue being explored. However, it would be worth undertaking textual analysis to confirm this, using search terms such as “climate change”, “global warming”, “greenhouse gas” or “sea level rise”.

Correlation analysis. What we are measuring here is merely *the addition rate* of environmentally-related readings. Unfortunately, the data available does not let us calculate the absolute level of environmentally-related readings by year as we do not know which articles have been edited out of reading lists year on year.

The overall findings of curriculum analysis:

- Out of a data set of 16,655 readings for 67 LSE IR courses (all available undergraduate and postgraduate courses 2019-2020), 757 readings (4.5%) are significantly related to environmental matters.
- 1st and 2nd year undergraduates have less than 3% of readings dedicated to environmental discussion.
- Background readings lists for 3rd year undergraduate and postgraduates contain the largest proportion of environmentally-related readings at 6.9% and 4.6% respectively.
- 67% of courses contain 0-2% of environmentally-related readings in both Essential and Background lists.
- The “Year Added” of a reading to a reading list has no bearing on its likelihood of being significantly related to environmental matters.

(II) Questionnaire

“It does seem crazy that the defining issue of the next decade, climate change, is reduced to one week across all 4 of my IR modules.” *Survey participant, anonymous IR student (#4)*

- —
○ — Q1 - What year of study are you in?
● —
- —
○ — Q2 - How would you describe your gender?
● —
- —
○ — Q3 - Which of the below topics do you see as integral to the study of IR? [Tick all that apply]
● —
- —
○ — Q4 - Where have you studied the topics climate and/ or environment? [Tick all that apply]
● —
- —
○ — Q5 - How would you describe your thoughts and feelings about the current global climate and environment?
● —
- —
○ — Q6 - Where do you currently obtain environment and climate education? [Tick all that apply]
● —
- —
○ — Q7 - Which of the below topics do you believe intersect with climate and environment analysis? [Tick all that apply]
● —
- —
○ — Q8 - How well do you think your IR course(s) integrate(s) climate and environment analysis?
● —
- —
○ — Q9 - Would you be interested in further integrating IR topics with climate and environment analysis?
● —
- —
○ — Q10 - Do you think IR courses should integrate climate and environment analysis?
● —

A self-selected dataset of 117 IR students (undergraduate, postgraduate and research students), comprising 5.1% of target population⁵, completed an anonymous 10 question survey (with comment space at the end). The questionnaire was advertised on IR Wires newsletter emails as well as emailed to students by 10 IR teaching staff; a £50 prize-draw incentive was offered.

The aim of this questionnaire has been to understand the extent to which IR students see an application for environmental matters in traditional IR spaces, and if this extent mirrors how they see this application play out in LSE's IR syllabi. Furthermore, if there is a disjuncture where perceived application supersedes actual application at LSE, I wanted to understand if this "matters" to students - do they have an interest in applying climate and environment to IR more than what is being done at the moment?

My core findings show that most sampled students see high applicability of environment across IR domains but that this isn't being communicated in their IR modules. This matters to the majority students who describe themselves as concerned about and proactively engaged in environmental matters: they want to see more integration.

Overall, most sampled students believe that all of the classic textbook IR domains intersect with climate and environment analysis: defence and security; diplomacy and international institutions; economics; energy; health; human rights; politics and government; social issues. According to these students, the most integral part of IR's domain related to climate and environment topics is "energy" closely followed by "economics". However, a significant 1/3 of students do not believe that these topics intersect with "human rights" nor "defence and security".

One anonymous survey participant (#1) even noted (in the comment section of questionnaire) the inadequacy of the IR discipline as a whole for dealing with environmental issues, echoing some IR scholars' contemporary gripes [see [Part 2 \(I\)](#)]: "It's hard to integrate climate with predominantly state-based theorists and seminar discussion only centered on these texts."

When questioned on the extent climate and environment is integrated in their course, the most common answer is that there is "minimal climate and environment analysis included". A further 20% believe that "there is no integration at all". Relatedly, anonymous survey participant (#2) wrote: "It is worth asking how does climate change affect international relations (therefore centering climate change), instead of studying climate change through IR (climate change as peripheral and decentralized)."

This seemingly conspicuous absence appears to significantly matter to most students. Over half of sampled students are "very interested" to further integrate climate and environment topics into their IR course(s) and just under half of students "strongly believe" general IR courses "should" be doing this anyway. Reflecting such, anonymous survey participant (#3) remarked: "I believe integrating Climate and Environment analysis in our IR course is of a critical importance to fully grasp the complexity of international relations and the major consequences of the environmental crisis on all the topics we

⁵ Students enrolled in IR2019/2020 courses totals 2,291; undergraduate students: 1242, postgraduate students: 1047, research students: 12. Caution needs to be made when drawing wider generalisations of this data. For example, roughly half of respondents were undergraduates, half were postgraduates and only 3 research students and there was an approximate 2:1 women:men ratio of respondents.

are discussing (politics, security, diplomacy, social issues, etc). In short, it really makes sense to me to integrate today's most important transnational issue in the IR courses."

Hence, although news and social media/ word of mouth are sampled students' predominate means of obtaining environment and climate education, the results above suggest most students want their university degrees to be a core platform for receiving such education instead or as well. Currently, only 16% of students claim to receive this education from their university degree. Commenting on this issue, anonymous survey participant (#4) wrote: "It does seem crazy that the defining issue of the next decade, climate change, is reduced to one week across all 4 of my modules whilst topics, which are fundamentally outdated and tell us little about today, remain. There really needs to be more effort to consciously include climate change within as many modules as possible to ensure we're best arming the students who are going to have to deal with this crisis."

This pairs with the finding that two thirds of students declare themselves "concerned and proactively engage in ways to reduce climate and environment degradation (on personal and/or wider levels)", followed by one in five stating they feel either too worried or disempowered to proactively act on these issues.

Reflections on methodology:

Survey uptake. Although IR students taking the 5-minute quiz were offered the chance to win a £50 voucher, uptake was very difficult to encourage and hence overall sample size was limited.

Furthermore, uptake became more difficult when coronavirus closed campus mid-March because the likelihood of IR teaching staff agreeing to email the survey link to students was much greater when I made this request in person (subsequently emailing the survey link in a template email for them to use).

Survey design. The majority of students partaking in survey declared they were "very interested" to further integrate climate and environment topics into IR courses. However, it is possible this proportion remains under-representative. 8% of respondents stated they "have never really studied these topics"; without understanding what constitutes a topic it may be difficult to truly ascertain one's interest in learning more about it.

Conversely, as explained in an interview with an IR professor, (LSE) students may be more likely to show a willingness in learning more about any topic than not when offered the chance. It was implied that the real test of students' interest in engaging with a specific topic is when it comes to negotiating the scarcity of syllabi space: what topics would students be willing to substitute in favour of climate and environment? Hence, if I were to repeat this research, I would perhaps have altered an existing question to ask: "Given that IR courses can only include so much material, would you like to see climate and environment substitute for any existing material you deem less relevant?"

The overall findings of the student questionnaire:

- Most students in my sample believe that all classic textbook IR domains intersect with climate and environment analysis, with "energy" and "economics" being the most important domains of intersection. However, 1/3 of my sample do not believe climate and environment topics intersect with "human rights" nor "defence and security".
- 60% of sample believe there is zero or minimal climate and environment analysis included in their IR course(s).
- More than half of sampled students are "very interested" to further integrate climate and environment topics into their IR course(s) and just under half of students "strongly believe" IR courses "should" be doing this anyway.
- Only 16% of sample receive climate and environment education from their university degree; most receive such from news and social media/word of mouth instead.
- Two thirds of sampled students are "concerned and proactively engage in ways to reduce climate and environment degradation (on personal and/or wider levels)", whilst 20% feel either too worried or disempowered to proactively act on these issues.

(III) Teaching Staff Interviews

"When I started my PhD research I was interested in development issues, but I soon realized that development is related to environmental issues." *Interview participant, anonymous IR staff member*

A sample of IR teaching staff were selected for interviews and a total of 15 (14 academic staff and 1 graduate teaching assistant) were carried out (12 face-to-face, 3 over email). These interviews broadly consisted of three questions: (1) What are your thoughts on the integrations between IR and environmental topics – if such do exist? (2) Do these intersections play out in LSE's IR department? (3) Is it important to be asking these questions?

Akin to my approach with the student questionnaire, my aim in these interviews has been to understand to what extent IR teaching staff see an application for environmental matters in traditional IR spaces, and if this extent mirrors how they see this application play out in LSE's IR department broadly. Furthermore, if there is a disjuncture where perceived application superseded actual application at LSE, I wanted to understand if interviewees had the desire or will to change the level of environment integration in LSE's IR department.

Similarly, I wanted to see if their *perception* of the extent to which these intersections are being researched at and studied at LSE roughly matches the weight given to environmental-related topics in IR syllabi as measured by this study's textual analysis [see [Part 3 \(I\)](#)].

My findings are that, overall, there is a significant gap between the stated importance teaching staff give to climate and environment in contemporary IR theory and application (high), and the 'practiced importance' of this intersection in the IR department (low). There is an approximate match between the perceived application of IR's integration with environmental matters (low integration levels) and my textual analysis research proxying such in LSE's IR syllabi (4-5% integration levels). Furthermore, most sampled teaching staff understand that LSE IR student demand for climate and environment inclusion in IR courses has been increasing over time, with an acceleration of interest in the past three or so years.

Most interviewees believe there are a multitude of ways environment is applicable to IR concerns over and above what the IR department is involved in – but over half of the interviewees imply that it is the responsibility of two specific IR courses dedicated to international environmental politics (IR367, IR467), or Development and Geography departments to supply environmental education. Hence, most imply that this disjuncture noted above does not warrant departmental curricula amendments.

So whilst the general belief from sampled teaching staff is that “one cannot isolate typical IR topics from environmental considerations”, only some from this group lament the IR department in their “sparse, fragmented efforts to address climate and environment education.”

Two interviewees note an inadequacy of current IR analysis being “largely based on consumptive models and assumptions”, suggesting that encouraging a critical perspective on “what is means to be developed, modern and progress” needs to be found in LSE's IR. They identified the need to be more open about the incentives which currently may prohibit IR professors from thoroughly tackling environmental intersections with IR. Furthermore, they argue environmental matters require a more thorough integration into IR courses based on both moral and intellectual reasoning. One out of the two of these interviewees elaborated on this point, believing the LSE academic community at large “are still living in a perpetual state of denial” with regards to environmental change. This is then said to do students a disservice in terms of “understanding reality” - the “principle function of universities”.

Alternatively, a different respondent believes environmental matters are appropriately integrated into LSE IR education and that students are suitably given the freedom to choose if they want environmental (or gender or other) applications to their IR study. They believe that any concerted action promoting any certain topic integration into syllabi paves the way for an “unacceptable” constriction on “academic freedom”.

Reflections on methodology:

My original research title was “To what extent is LSE's International Relations (IR) department marginalising climate and environment education?” However, a few interviews in, I understood the inflection of judgement the word “marginalised” brings and my research title has been subsequently substituted this for “integrated” in Question 1 of my research [see [Introduction](#)]. Conjuring hostility with my interviewees or wider IR community was to be avoided, not least for the sake of research's reliability!

The overall findings of the teaching staff interviews:

- A significant gap exists between the stated importance sampled teaching staff give to climate and environment in contemporary IR theory and application (high), and the 'practiced importance' of this intersection in the IR department (low).
- There is an approximate match between interviewees' perceived application of IR's integration with environmental matters (low integration levels) and my textual analysis results [see [Part 3 \(I\)](#)] proxying such in LSE's IR syllabi (4-5% integration levels).
- Over half of the interviewees imply that the lack of environmental 'mainstreaming' in LSE's IR courses does not warrant change: environment and climate's application to IR is already being sufficiently dealt with in IR367 and IR467 as well as the Development and Geography departments.
- Yet, from the remaining interviewees, there exists tangible interest in the department addressing the “significant gap”.

Part 4 Recommendations

(I) Recommendations for LSE

“As scholars... we are a genuinely self-regulating profession both in what constitutes knowledge and in how we define and create incentives for professional success.” *David Lake, 2011:465*

What could potentially be at stake for LSE if their IR department does not further integrate climate and environment education?

In line with LSE's 2030 Strategy, which commits to optimising social science's real-world applicability, it would seem of value to LSE to support departmental initiatives which encourage climate and environment research and study. Crucially, this is not an argument about LSE lacking climate and environment research and knowledge. Instead, this research presents evidence to support the dissemination and engagement of LSE's world-class insights into climate and environment matters, across departments and students.

This research has presented evidence to suggest that less than five per cent of the average LSE IR course involves integrating discussions on climate and environment topics. Additionally, the evidence suggests there is a broad agreement between IR staff and students that climate and environment are vital topics to see in LSE's IR education.

However, it appears from the evidence that this broad agreement between staff and students can break down when discussing if departmental change (i.e. initiatives for broad-based integration of environmental discussion) is warranted. There seems a diverging opinion between where most students expect to find environmental-related education (integrated through their 67 IR modules) and where most staff believe this education belongs (in the IR376 IR476 specialist courses or modules in Geography or Development departments).

'Cordon-off' environmental analysis like this though is a high-risk strategy for LSE to be taking for the sake of an enormous number of actors and institutions.

Firstly, the average IR student's educational experience is potentially being compromised, as indicated above. Similarly, some incumbent or future IR teaching staff may temper their value of their tenure if they feel the department is not taking climate and environmental matters seriously in terms of course syllabi and research [see **Part 3 (III)**]. Hence, LSE is at risk of undermining the value, and therefore competitiveness, of the LSE IR department if our historical and contemporary environmental phenomena remain the domain of 2/67 IR courses. The department's remarkable ranking of 5th in the QS World University Ranking by Subject 2020 tables for Politics and International Studies (QS Top Universities, 2020) may be jeopardy.

Secondly, the average IR student's employability could be limited. Consultancy, an industry defined by problem-solving in fast-moving globalised contexts, is the number one sector LSE IR graduates are employed by. International organisations and the civil service are also large employers. IR students need to be graduating today having applied their attention to distribution and power, institutional design, the role of norms and ideas, and other political dynamics to global environmental issues – mirroring today's reality that this integration reigns large.

This point gestures to the more far-reaching argument to be made. That is, LSE students are tomorrow's world leaders, problem-solvers and policy-makers. We need to be gearing each student with the ability to navigate and ameliorate our contemporary global issues, most of which are inextricably tied to the environment. There is also a strong argument that such education supports one's understanding of social justice.

For instance, at the time of this study it appears that one third of IR students do not believe climate and environmental topics intersect with human rights. This worrying. It was all the way back in 2012 that the UN Human Rights Council publicly established a mandate on human rights and the environment to “study the human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and promote best practices relating to the use of human rights in environmental policymaking” (UN, 2019). Yet, despite “the number and scope of international and domestic laws, judicial decisions, and academic studies on the relationship between human rights and the environment [having] grown rapidly” (ibid), it appears significant numbers of IR students may not connect access rights to the environment to one's rights to basic human freedoms.

In keeping with the ambition of LSE's Pro-Director for Education, it would appear that actioning LSE's 2030 Strategy will require a notable reappraisal of the status quo in terms of the way LSE disseminates education. For LSE's education to truly “thrive... in a rapidly changing world”, we need to seriously consider the relationship between those real-world variables catalysing the most significant difficulties and opportunities, and our curriculum.

Recommendation 1: Rethinking our approach to reading lists

This study and many others (e.g. Phull et al, 2018) experience university reading lists as strongly political. Hence, it is likely that any alteration to reading list arrangements will face much contestation. However, in light of the evidence and what is at stake, it appears necessary to initiate rethinking our current approach to reading lists in spite of inevitable uphill struggles ahead.

Giving an example of "rethinking" strategy, the department could make readings list scripting a more open, democratic process. This could involve inviting input from students (e.g. implement a feedback platform on Moodle specifically for reading list feedback and ideas); from other disciplines (e.g. encourage Geography, Development and Grantham Institute professors to share readings with IR professors which discuss climate and environment intersections with IR analysis) as well as from other professors in the department. It is envisaged that professors would subsequently be able to negotiate with a much wider array of inputs - including from the critical stakeholder (students) - to create reading lists.

*Quotas nor prescription are **not** recommended by this research* as tools for topic integration into course syllabi research; top-down, non-deliberative directives are not endorsed. This study aims to continue the initiative LSE has successfully begun, of engaging ever-greater sections of the student population to influence and make decisions about the university's educational framework.

Recommendation 2: More resources allocated to exploring IR and environment education

I recommend that LSE's IR department consider hiring a new academic member of staff to expand the research on the way IR topics intersect with climate and environment education. They could arrange IR research groups and conferences (with other universities, think-tanks, government, NGOs, business) on how climate and environment are shaping IR today.

This role could include working with IR367/ IR467's professor and The Grantham Institute to specifically support professors engage with IR and environment intersections. After all, Grantham's self-described function is to be the nexus between research on climate change and environment and international political economy (alongside other disciplines).

"...Until scholars—particularly younger scholars—see opportunities for career advancement in environmental politics, we are unlikely to observe substantial change. It is crucial, therefore, for journal editors, dissertation advisers, hiring committees, graduate-course conveners, funders, and other gatekeepers in the field to increase the priority they place on environmental themes." (Green and Hale, 2007:478)

(II) Avenues for Further Research

This research elicits a number of avenues for further research, based on the intriguing 'unknowns' I came across where there is currently insufficient data to make conclusions.

Research track 1: What *kind* of environmental issues are most prominently explored in IR syllabi?

One could make a worthwhile speculation that climate change is the environmental issue most prominently explored in IR syllabi. Whilst undertaking a literature review, it is evident that out of all environmental topics, climate change reaps the most attention by far.

Top IR journals tend to publish more on climate change than on any other subject (Green and Hale 2017) – and if IR syllabis (in LSE) do roughly follow the same patterns of environmental-matter-engagement as the IR field, climate change is likely to be disproportionately present⁶.

This is concerning. Ecologists have identified nine 'planetary boundaries', defined as threats to core life-support systems of the environment that forms of life depend on for survival – and climate change is only one such threat. Other threats are very serious indeed - such as ocean acidification and chemical pollution - but have received scant attention.

Hence, it would be useful to break up the search terms used in data analysis and gather statistics on topic occurrence independently. This way one could verify, out of the environmental integration that is occurring, what kind of environmental issues are most prominently explored in IR syllabi and if there is a similar climate change bias in syllabi to that which is present in IR literature.

⁶ This study's interviews and secondary research support such, although the textual analysis cannot verify this as "climate" was not searched for independently – nor were any of the other words. This research would be worth undertaking however, with more search words such as "global warming", "greenhouse gas" or "sea level rise".

Research track 2: What faculty members are likely to integrate environmental matters into IR teaching, and under what conditions?

Inspired by Phull et al (2018), it would be of value to understand what makes certain teaching staff more inclined to integrate environmental matters into their IR courses. Such a study would have direct relevance to the practical application of further integrating environmental education into the broad-base of the IR department. For example, it would be interesting to look at the relationship between extent of environmental integration and the course convener e.g. seniority; length of tenure at LSE; nationality, gender; age and prior education.

Research track 3: How do other university IR degree programmes integrate environment and climate discussions?

This study used publicly available online material to assess the extent to which which climate and environment topics were integrated into other universities IR departments. However, a systematic study on the integration of environmental matters in university IR programmes is required to more fully understand what the landscape of environmental integration in tertiary IR education looks like. Such would provide a much more robust base to understand what 'best practice' currently looks like and make comparisons and recommendations from. This research was outside the scope of my study.

Part 5 Conclusion

This research gages the state of LSE's IR education vis-à-vis its integration of climate and environment discussions and explores the impact of such integration, using a methodology comprising of four strands: secondary research, textual analysis, an online closed-question survey and open-question interviews.

The level of LSE's IR syllabi's integration with environment and climate topics is around 4.5% when analysing reading lists, roughly mirroring the wider IR discipline's integration with these topics.

The validity of this finding is bolstered by this research's questionnaire findings: 60% of sampled students believe there is zero or minimal climate and environment analysis included in their IR course(s) and only 16% believe they receive climate and environment education from their IR course(s).

Similarly, this research's interviews with IR teaching staff reflect the finding that IR courses have marginal levels of integration with environmental discussions.

However, there seems to be a divergence of opinion about whether this 'matters'. Although this study found that both students and staff believe environmental matters hold a core position within international relations policy and theory, there is a broad disjuncture between those who believe that IR curriculum adaptation is consequently warranted and those who do not.

More than half of sampled students are "very interested" in seeing their IR course(s) further integrate environment topics whilst just under half "strongly believe" these courses "should" be doing this anyway. On the other hand, most interviewed staff imply that environmental discussions belong in IR367 and IR467 as well as the Development and Geography departments.

I argue that segmenting environmental education to only two out of sixty-seven IR courses is a high-risk strategy, not least for the success of LSE's IR Department itself. I recommend rethinking current approaches to reading list scripting, and allocate more resources to exploring IR and environment education.

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