

RESEARCH REPORT

Mapping Project on Undergraduate NACD Education in Public Universities across the United States and Australia

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Executive Summary

This report observes the prevalence and accessibility of NACD (Non-proliferation, Arms Control, and Disarmament) education across the post-secondary education system in the United States and Australia. Using a variety of publicly available information: course descriptions, outlines, contents, and syllabi (where applicable), the report maps the number of undergraduate courses discussing NACD topics across 50 largest public universities by state and seven Ivy League institutions in the United States and 37 public universities in Australia. The resulting database observes the following results:

- A broad lack of courses completely focusing on NACD topics.
- 52 out of 95 total universities (55%) offer courses that mention NACD topics.
- In the United States, 33 out of 50 largest public universities (66%) in each state and 7 out of 8 Ivy League institutions offer at least one “partial” NACD course.
- In Australia, only 12 out of 37 public universities (32%) offer similar courses.

The majority of NACD courses observed in this report primarily deal with the issue of nuclear non-proliferation: out of the 72 partial disarmament-oriented courses observed, 41 (57%) focus on the topic. In terms of departments offering such courses, Political Science and various iterations of International Relations continue to dominate. Overall, this report highlights a general lack of accessibility to disarmament education throughout institutions in both countries that warrant further research and policy action, especially in a conflict-ridden world today.

Introduction

From Ukraine to Gaza, Myanmar to Sudan, conflict remains well and alive today. Against the backdrop of thousands of casualties, destruction of livelihoods and safety, and uncountable legacies of trauma and persistent insecurity, states and non-state actors continue to invest in

means to prolong conflicts, from simple armaments such as handguns and landmines to increasingly sophisticated ones such as drones and unmanned missiles. Compounding these factors is the occasional flare up of tensions between nuclear superpowers, most recently between India and Pakistan.

It is in this fragile, conflict-prone environment that makes it crucial for new generations of academics and scholars in the fields of politics, policy, security and international affairs be equipped with adequate knowledge and analytical abilities in finding solutions to current conflicts and preventing potential ones in the near future. Given the nuanced nature of these topics, universities remain the most ideal places for such students to fulfill said objective.

This report aims to highlight the prevalence of what has been defined as NACD (Non-proliferation, Arms Control, and Disarmament) education across public universities in the United States and Australia. Using publicly available information such as course descriptions, this report establishes the accessibility (or a lack thereof) of undergraduate students to courses addressing or mentioning NACD topics in both countries, mapping a database of these courses and analyzing both their numbers and delivery.

This research has been conducted by Phone Min Thant, a third-year undergraduate (Hon.) student at the School for International Studies at Simon Fraser University, under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Megan MacKenzie, Professor of International Studies and Simons Chair in International Law and Human Security. The research and the methodology are inspired by a similar study conducted by Alireza Mamdouhi, a Ph.D. student at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs and Prof. Paul Meyer, Adjunct Professor of International Studies and Fellow in International Security at Simon Fraser University on NACD education across Canadian universities.

Methodology

- **Choice of institutions**

Due to the scale of research necessary to completely document NACD education across universities in both the United States and Australia, a number of limitations were deliberately implemented. Firstly, only undergraduate courses were included in the analysis of research data. This was not only because of the large magnitude of the research topic, but also in establishing that any NACD-related course (or a lack of it) has greater exposure to a larger

student body, as undergraduate enrollment always outweighs that of other levels of education. Secondly, the observation has been conducted only at public institutions, with the exception of Ivy League institutions (whose inclusion will be explained later). This was done for a number of reasons: their relatively larger student and faculty populations, their relative accessibility to students across diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and their possession of generally larger sets of programs and courses. The choice of public institutions thus ensures a wider coverage of data on NACD education across both countries studied in this report. For similar reasons, the report only observes the university with the highest numbers of student enrollment in each state. While the inclusion of Ivy Leagues stands out from this primary methodology, it was hypothesized that observing NACD education in such institutions will provide a better sense of the prevalence (or a lack thereof) of disarmament education across universities that are considered to possess significant academic and financial resources and research capabilities. Although their student numbers are comparatively smaller than that of the many public universities in the list, it has been concluded that the pre-established reputation of Ivy League schools deserve some observation in this education-based mapping project.

- **Data Collection**

The research data in this report has been obtained using publicly accessible information from the websites of selected universities, based majorly on analyses of course descriptions and outlines. Syllabi and course contents have been used where accessible, but the majority of the database has been constructed by observing the mention of the words including “disarmament,” “arms control,” and “nuclear non-proliferation,” as well as related concepts, issues, and events (such as the Arms Control Treaty). In obtaining this information, both course handbooks and course search functions have been employed, mainly combing through several programs where NACD courses were most prevalently seen: Political Science, History, International Affairs/Relations/Studies, Peace Studies, and Government. Courses containing frequently-alternating “Special Topics” or implied disarmament (such as when disarmament takes place between previously warring factions during peacebuilding efforts) have been omitted from the database as they possess no concrete evidence to establish their relation to NACD issues and are subject to constant changes in outlines and syllabi. As mentioned previously, only undergraduate courses were analyzed.

Similar to the database constructed by Meyer and Mamdouhi (2024), the database contains important information related to each course highlighted, including its name and code,

syllabus (where applicable), the name(s) of the instructor(s), its department/school, a brief course description, and a “partial” or “complete” designation in terms of the course’s mention of NACD topics.

The term “partial” connotes that the featured course mentions several of the aforementioned key words in its description and/or includes NACD issues in their description in addition to other unrelated (or marginally related) contents. To this “partial” designation, several categories have been assigned including “WMD,” “Nuclear (non-proliferation),” and “AC (arms control),” in establishing how different aspects of NACD have been mentioned. “Complete” indicates that the course is solely focused on NACD topics. However, as the database shows, there is no course with a “complete” designation.

Results

General Prevalence of NACD Education:

Across the 95 universities from both countries studied in this database, the most striking observation is the absolute lack of courses completely focusing on NACD topics. However, arms control, nuclear non-proliferation, and disarmament can be partially noticed in various forms in courses that do not solely focus on NACD affairs. Out of the 95 universities in the database, 52 universities (55 percent of all universities) offer courses that mention NACD topics in one iteration or another (and not necessarily simultaneously — i.e. some courses briefly mention nuclear non-proliferation but not disarmament in general). Universities from the United States offer a larger variety of “partial” NACD-related courses, with 33 out of 50 largest public universities (66 percent) in each state and 7 out of 8 Ivy League institutions offer at least one “partial” NACD course. In Australia, however, only 12 out of 37 public universities (32 percent) offer similar courses, showing a general lack of NACD education across Australian higher education.

The majority of NACD-related courses focus on the topic of nuclear non-proliferation. Out of the 72 partial disarmament-oriented courses observed, 41 (57 percent) focus on nuclear non-proliferation (sometimes alongside a broader arms control topic), making nuclear non-proliferation education a prominent part of NACD education in both the United States and Australia. This is true in both the former’s case (32 out of 59 NACD-related courses) and latter’s

(9 out of 12). A majority of these NACD-related courses are also noticeably only offered at an upper-division (i.e. senior) level (third and fourth years), particularly in the case of the United States.

Geographic divergences:

- **The United States**

NACD-related courses are most prevalent at the University of Washington (4 courses), making that state the leading area for NACD education at an undergraduate level, although this course density is supported by only one institution. A five-way cluster follows with 3 courses each: Massachusetts (3 courses across 2 universities), New York (3 courses / 2 universities), New Hampshire (3 courses / 1 university), and Georgia (3 courses / 1 university). States hosting the largest institutional prevalence of NACD education are all in the Northeast: Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island — each with 2 universities offering NACD-related courses. 20 states have just a single university offering a single NACD-related course while 14 states show 0 universities / 0 courses in the database. Regionally, the Northeast is largest with 18 courses / 13 universities, followed by the South (17 / 11), West (13 / 8) and Midwest (10 / 9).

- **Australia**

In Australia, New South Wales dominates the NACD education scene, offering 5 courses from 5 different universities across the state. This was followed by Queensland and Western Australia, each offering 2 courses from 2 universities, and Victoria (2 courses / 1 university). The Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania each possess 1 NACD-related course from 1 university. South Australia and the Northern Territory have no institutions offering any NACD-related courses.

Departmental Analysis:

Across universities in both countries, Political Science remains the department/school primarily responsible for delivering NACD education, followed closely by various iterations of International Relations, History and lastly, Peace and Strategic Studies (or broader Humanities). While similar patterns exist in how each department offers such courses, there are also several noteworthy divergences.

A scan of course descriptions reveals that courses offered by Political Science and International Relations tend to place NACD issues in a broader security, geopolitical, or strategy agenda. In both the United States and Australia, these two departments have also tended to place NACD topics as a subset of national foreign policy. There is no focus on NACD as a standalone issue. These departments also tend to emphasize an active discussion on policy issues within the NACD realm. A striking feature of NACD-related courses in these departments is also their majorly state-centric nature, particularly noticeable in Australia where such courses tend to emphasize state security rather than take an activist stance. Similar patterns have been observed in courses offered by departments of Government and Security Studies.

As for History, in both countries, NACD has been generally mentioned as a part of a larger discussion on the history of conflicts, wars, or ideologies. A prominent feature has been to incorporate NACD issues (particularly nuclear non-proliferation) into a broader study of the Cold War or a history of each state (and international institutions) in the post-WWII era.

Lastly, NACD-related courses offered by various Peace Studies departments usually emphasize activism and as a part of larger peacebuilding efforts. Peace Studies departments in both countries also treat disarmament in tandem with demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) frameworks characteristic of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction strategies. There is also a general focus on disarmament as a form of activism in searching for alternatives to militarization.

Conclusion

Despite the importance of NACD education in universities, the research shows that it remains underrepresented across both the United States and Australia. This is especially true in the latter's case, where only 32 percent of all public institutions offer NACD-related courses at the undergraduate level. While Ivy Leagues and larger public universities in the United States suggest greater attention being paid to NACD issues, geographic divergences remain as 14 states do not possess any NACD-oriented curriculums (and 20 more only offering 1 course each) while states in the Northeast (with the exception of Washington) hold a degree of dominance on the field. It can also be noticed that several departments dominate the NACD education scene, denying its offering to many general students, compounded by their added inaccessibility as often upper-division courses. Similar to Meyer and Mamdouhi's (2024)

conclusion on Canadian universities, this institutional gap in educating students on NACD topics presents a large loss of research, policy, and academic potential in such issues that can lead to wider gaps in issues of security, demilitarization, and peace. While extracurricular projects like this database do expose certain students to NACD education, it remains difficult for (undergraduate) students to rely on universities alone to achieve a level of deep understanding and policy action in that field.

The research conducted in this report remains subjected to many limitations over which further research and observation is highly recommended. This database is meant to serve as a stepping-stone upon which future research may be based, and as such, feedback from various disarmament researchers, university communities, and other interested parties is greatly appreciated. While not an overt call to action, this report urges public universities in both the United States and Australia to pay greater attention to NACD education especially as conflicts around the world continue to proliferate and intensify. Peace, demilitarization, and security (both human and state-centered theorizations) are all obtainable only with a population equipped with adequate knowledge on how to achieve them — a central mandate of NACD education. An institutional failure to provide said education in a more meaningful and widespread manner thus remains a challenge that deserves positive changes in the future.