CHAPTER 18

Rethinking Security Education

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Introduction

"How have you proved the haters wrong?" In April 2015, undergraduate students in the University of Maryland's Program in Terrorism Studies launched the Twitter campaign, #NoHateUSA. The campaign encouraged people to openly share an experience where they "proved [their] haters wrong" and stood against what they believed to be problematic, accepted norms, values, attitudes, or beliefs. Participants tweeted a moment in which they had combatted discrimination and challenged others to follow suit. Tweets included, "I prove the haters wrong by building broad alliances that stand for equality and a fair society for all people"; "I proved the haters wrong when I married outside my religion"; and "We prove the haters wrong by hosting town halls and events where everyone is welcome to discuss pressing social issues."

The architects of the campaign created it as part of a US State Department program, *Peer 2 Peer* (*P2P*): *Challenging Extremism*. The State Department launched *P2P* in order to empower university students across the globe to develop digital content to counter violent extremist

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messaging and enhance mutual understanding across cultures. Through a semester-long course, students studying at over 20 universities around the world created social media campaigns aimed at engaging networks of youth to counter the social media presence of violent extremists. The program aimed to support the development of digital content that would empower young people to join the mission of countering violent extremism, thus catalyzing others to create their own initiatives or tools to counter extremism, and build a community around shared values opposing extremism. NoHateUSA, created by four University of Maryland undergraduates, stands for National Outreach for Hate Awareness and Threat Education and aims to empower young people to stand against targeted violence across the USA through the creation of a supportive social media campaign. Creating the campaign to combat the use of social media platforms to recruit individuals to radical action, the student architects of NoHateUSA hope to share messages of peace and unity via the same communications channels. One student creator said of the campaign, "[it] means showing people that we all have our differences, we all have struggles, we all feel helpless, we all make mistakes and do things that we regret, but we are all capable of changing ourselves for the better and 'proving the haters wrong.' "

Through P2P, a US Federal agency encouraged university students to serve as vanguards in the fight against violent extremism through the engagement of social media—an approach to countering terrorism which might have been unbelievable in the early days of US counterterrorism policy. This recognition of students' value in promoting national and international security and students' aptitude for using new technology has emerged relatively recently and reflects a response to a shifting security landscape marked by Internet radicalization and cybercrime. It is further driven by the recognition that a one-size-fits-all, law enforcement- and military-driven approach to security are insufficient to address the full range of security challenges that emerge in diverse community contexts worldwide. In such an environment, new security challenges require new skills. The NoHateUSA campaign, created by students enrolled in University of Maryland's Program in Terrorism Studies, highlights one approach to educating students in fields related to security studies: one which prepares students for today's security environment not only by developing their content knowledge of security policy but also by developing their intercultural competence and technological literacy.

An Early Framework for Academic Programs Related to Terrorism and Security Studies

In 2005, the National Research Council issued a report, *Frameworks for Higher Education in Homeland Security*, to address how colleges and universities could best respond to the new and growing student demand for homeland-security programs in the wake of September 11. This report, which reflected input from a range of scholars engaged in work related to homeland security, proposed that interdisciplinary coursework should be at the core of academic programming related to security studies, arguing that a full understanding of the nature of terrorist threats would require inputs from multiple perspectives and disciplines. This prescription for homeland-security education challenged the nature of teaching on terrorism and security studies at the time. Traditionally, education on terrorism—like most subjects in US universities—resided almost entirely within disciplinary boundaries, typically failing to bridge gaps between fields or between the academic and policy communities. The NRC report emphasized the need for successful programs to overcome this shortcoming, arguing for solutions that leveraged the strengths of existing academic disciplines and brought those types of disciplinary expertise together to develop inter- or transdisciplinary approaches to studying terrorism and homeland security.

Revolutionary at the time, the NRC's report contributed to the birth of a series of interdisciplinary programs in homeland-security studies, including the author's institutional home, University of Maryland's interdisciplinary Program in Terrorism Studies. The program is part of the efforts of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), a Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence headquartered at University of Maryland and made up of faculty members at over 60 universities. Founded in 2005, START created the Program in Terrorism Studies in 2007, following the issuance of the NRC's recommendations on how best to teach about terrorism and using their recommended emphasis on inter- and transdisciplinarity as a framework for program development. Since the origins of its curricular programming in 2007, START has worked to pioneer inclusive and interdisciplinary approaches to security education, using a wide variety of educational settings, from traditional to online classrooms, from virtual simulations to study abroad. And, nearly 10 years after the issuance of the NRC report, we argue for another rethinking of security education.

In this rethinking effort, we continue to emphasize inter- and transdisciplinarity, but we also build on the NRC recommendations. Our approach to security education moves beyond studying "security" as a subject, and asks students to view themselves and each other as change agents, whose daily actions can contribute to building peace and prosperity in their communities. Furthermore, our approach fills a gap in the earlier NRC recommendations, which overlooked the increasing importance of technology in education and the security sector. Our approach fills these gaps by giving our students hands-on training in soft and hard skills—specifically, intercultural competence and technological literacy—necessary for navigating today's security environment. *Security is not just something our students learn about*; *it is something they do*. This pedagogical perspective allows us to prepare our students for today's unique security challenges, characterized by a world in which people and ideas routinely cross cultural and geographic boundaries. In this essay, I describe this transformative approach to security education, illustrated by one notable example of a pedagogical exercise aimed at developing conditions of intergroup contact and competencies like empathy, relationship-building, and adaptability—all within the context of technological literacy—among 20,000 online students from more than 180 nations.

Shifts in the Way We Talk About Security Studies

START spent our first years developing curricular programming focused on understanding terrorist motivations and behaviors, emphasizing engagement with empirical evidence from START's landmark Global Terrorism Database (GTD)—the largest, unclassified database of terrorist incidents in the world, which, as of 2015, contained information on more than 125,000 terrorist attacks. In fact, much of our early work was focused on training students to use empirical data on terrorism in order to make informed judgments about related phenomena. This was a direct result of the nature of terrorism studies at the time. When START was born, our director, criminologist Gary LaFree, frequently introduced our efforts to collect empirical data on terrorism with a 2001 quotation from psychologist Andrew Silke: "[Terrorism studies] exists on a diet of fast food research: quick, cheap, ready-to-hand and nutritionally dubious."[1] Much of START's work between 2005 and 2015 has focused on negating this statement and building large stores of terrorism data that our researchers use to understand terrorism and that instructors of all levels use to teach about terrorism.

Mirroring our research efforts, teaching students to work with empirical data in order to make informed decisions about terrorism has been a primary goal in our security studies educational mission. Not only do we use GTD data in many of our courses, we have developed a training program that provides students with hands-on experience working with GTD data and basic data analysis skills from multiple social science disciplines. But while this focus on instilling both knowledge about terrorism and the ability to analyze terrorism using multidisciplinary methodologies in students remains, we believe the shifts in how political leaders and scholars talk about terrorism require yet more shifts in the way that we educate about security. These shifts we observe in US security discourse indicate an increasing emphasis on our nation's cultural pluralism as an asset, rather than an impediment, in our pursuit of a more peaceful and secure world.

As START Senior Researcher and Department of Homeland Security Scholar-in-Residence, Susan Szmania, writes, the national conversation about terrorism has shifted from a purely security-focused conversation to one that includes attention to perspectives from peace studies and conflict transformation. Szmania describes a process of evolution in US government perspective on violent extremism between 2010 and 2015 which demonstrates a shift from confronting terrorism purely from a law enforcement perspective to the incorporation of community engagement and conflict transformation strategies. Szmania describes a process of burgeoning interest in linking security with resilience and peace, beginning with the 2010 *National Security Strategy* that highlighted "strategic communications" as a key to US security; building through the 2011 *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, which called for the development of international partnerships to build community resilience; and strengthening again with the release of two White House reports calling for engagement and dialogue with local communities (2011's *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism* and *Strategic Implementation Plan*). For Szmania, the process recently culminated in the February 2015 White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), where President Obama called for efforts to better understand violent extremist ideologies and for new strategies to address these concerns, including "strengthening democracy around the world as a way to bolster and stabilize fragile communities."[2] These documents attend to the increasing importance of information and communications technologies. In parallel, the 2011 *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* asserted the importance of leveraging global media

and communications technologies to counter violent extremist narratives, and the 2011 *Strategic Implementation Plan* attested to the need to "leverage and support the use of new technologies to engage communities, build and mobilize networks against violent extremism, and undercut terrorist narratives."[3]

To keep up with this shifting discussion about tools used to counter violent extremism, we believe that it is important to continually evolve terrorism and security studies education. We find that training students to analyze terrorism is critical to preparing them for security-related careers. But we also find that it is not the only thing we need to do for our students. We need to provide them with a set of soft and hard skills that are not traditionally taught in security education programming and that will prepare them to work in physical and virtual CVE and conflict transformation environments.

A Framework from Peace Education

In order to prepare students to approach security from the perspective of current CVE discussions, we turn to peace education principles, which have applications in security education despite the differing disciplinary orientations and lineages of peace studies and security studies. In 2000, Betty Reardon summarized peace education as a constellation of values, pedagogical approaches, and interdisciplinary histories, aimed at establishing cultural values and national, international, and transnational systems and policies that emphasize "the achievement and maintenance of mutually beneficial circumstances that enhance the life possibilities of all."[4] In this framework, peace education can be understood as two separate categories: education *for* peace—education to create an informed and peace-appreciating citizenry—and education *about* peace—education on conflict transformation and on competencies that allow students to work successfully to resolve conflicts.

Other peace education scholars and programs have built on this second concept—education *about* peace—and have worked to further develop a model of the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for peace education competency. We choose to work with a model developed by the youth peacebuilding program War Child Holland and cited as a best practice by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). War Child Holland identifies a set of five competencies that peace education programs should train students in: creativity, or openness to new approaches; empathy, or

the ability to understand the perceptions, points of view, interpretations, anxieties, and needs of different parties; relationship development, or the capacity to relate to others; nonviolence, which includes verbal and nonverbal nonviolent behavior and includes good listening skills and patience; and adaptability, or the ability to function in an uncertain environment.[5] At START, we draw particularly on one core theory from the field of peace education: the notion that contact between groups and individuals can—under certain circumstances[6] and through certain processes[7]—lead to reduced prejudice and increased empathy, trust, and relationship-building and adaptation skills.

Sociologist Thomas Pettigrew's formulation for producing intergroup contact effects requires four interrelated processes: "learning about the outgroup, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and ingroup reappraisal."[8] In other words, an individual learns about and becomes exposed to members of a group against whom he holds a bias; based on this learning, he changes his behavior toward members of this group; his changed behavior results in the creation of bonds between himself and members of the group against which he previously held a bias; and he eventually returns to his own group and reconsiders the nature of the original bias. Intergroup contact theory is therefore a meso-level phenomenon, which moves between micro-level personal beliefs and macro-level social structures. The relevance to security studies is immediately clear: security is produced by fostering and maintaining positive[9] relations between peoples, groups, and nations—that is, sustainable security involves positive relations both at the micro-level (the personal level) and the macro-level (the state level). Intergroup contact theory therefore allows educators to engage with students of security studies not as empty vessels who exist to receive content-based knowledge but as individuals who bring prior knowledge and experience to the classroom and who act as change agents in their daily efforts to develop peaceful relationships. Students of security studies, in this view, build sustainable security practices through their personal efforts to engage with, understand, and foster positive relationships with people who differ from themselves. They make micro-level changes in their own behavior, which, when taken collectively with micro-level changes enacted by others, are conducive to the macro-level social changes that produce "security." In this context at START, we engage with the notion of contact theory and apply an intergroup contact model in our efforts to foster collaboration and communication between students to develop conflict transformation competencies.

Intergroup Contact in a 20,000-Person Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

We make an effort to incorporate principles of peace education and intergroup contact into many facets of our programming—including online simulations of crisis situations, study abroad programs, internships and externships, and volunteer emergency response work—but here we highlight one particular intergroup contact exercise, which exemplifies a dual emphasis on developing students' intercultural competency and technological literacy skills. Since 2014, START has offered a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) titled *Understanding Terrorism and the Terrorist Threat*, a course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the Internet, through University of Maryland and MOOC provider Coursera. Coursera partners with universities and public sector organizations around the world to create MOOCs offering traditional curricular materials such as filmed lectures, readings, and assignments, as well as interactive user forums to support community interactions between students, faculty, and teaching assistants.

The diversity of students in the course, based on geographic location, race and ethnicity, age, profession, and background, has been striking. In two iterations, nearly 40,000 students from more than 180 nations have enrolled in the course. The top 12 reported countries comprising the student population were the USA, the UK, Canada, Spain, the Netherlands, India, Brazil, Greece, Australia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Germany. Of particular note were high student populations from India, Nigeria, and Pakistan, countries that have been heavily impacted by terrorism. Students brought an array of educational backgrounds to the course, ranging from individuals with less than a secondary school diploma through doctorates. Survey information also indicated that among professionals connected to terrorism, there was a diverse group of students, including numerous individuals from the military, academia, and the private sector. Five students even identified themselves as members of "radical organizations," although no participants gave any indication of specific group affiliation during the course.

Creating an environment conducive to sparking the processes for intergroup contact effects—such as increased empathy and mutual understanding—in an online space with a diverse student body requires mindful course design. Intergroup contact effects cannot be forcibly induced, but educators can structure classrooms (virtual or physical) as spaces that allow for the types of interpersonal engagement necessary for intergroup contact effects. In our MOOC, we made the design choice to create an

open discussion forum for all students. We based this choice on a series of observations we made during the pilot iteration of the course. In this first offering, we observed that open forums produced two trends related to the meso-level processes of intergroup contact: one which we wanted to build on in subsequent iterations of the course and one which we wanted to discourage.

The first trend we observed was the organic evolution of intergroup contact, in which a Venezuelan university student intervened in a forum thread exploring definitions of terrorism to address the broader question of whether a universal definition of terrorism was necessary. This student, who had been involved in the 2014 student protests in Venezuela, posted in the forum stating that the Venezuelan government was attempting to label the protesters as terrorists. The student wrote that they now understood the need for a universal definition of terrorism, because it would allow them to credibly and authoritatively prove the Venezuelan state wrong and announce unequivocally that the student protesters were not terrorists. Up to that point, the forum had focused on debates over the nuances of academic and governmental definitions and had been disconnected from the student's lived experiences. What followed was a lively discussion of activism and violence at the intersections of academic, professional, and personal experience. This poster, in raising their personal experiences related to terrorism and counterterrorism, created a new avenue for discussion in the class and shifted the discourse among students from the macro-level (security in Venezuela and definitions of terrorism) to the micro-level (their personal experiences of protesting and interacting with agents of the state) and back again. This opened the possibility of students engaging with each other as individuals with unique experiences rather than as abstractions.

This meso-level process, while creating positive intergroup contact effects in this instance, also produced the opposite effect, with some students feeling excluded from the discussion. Concurrent with the Venezuelan student's personal intervention in an academic debate, we observed the second trend—that students lacking prior experience studying terrorism or working in a related field felt unprepared to contribute and uncomfortable in the forums. We realized that relying solely on personal experience as a means for students to engage meaningfully with each other and with course content was insufficient. Connecting these two forum experiences, we researched techniques for inclusivity in incorporating personal backgrounds, experiences, and identities into classroom

discussions and for facilitating dialogue between individuals from diverse backgrounds—while also implicitly training students on how to engage meaningfully and respectfully in online environments. We eventually selected the "Fishbowl and Caucus," which is an intergroup contact exercise frequently used in Intergroup Dialogue Programs.[10]

The Fishbowl Caucus Dialogue method was developed by behavioral scientists in post-World War II USA. As racial tensions heightened and social justice became an increasingly contentious issue, researchers looked for methods to facilitate collaboration and decrease interpersonal conflict, using the conceptual framework of intergroup contact and research on resolving conflict and group dynamics. The model was inadvertently conceived in 1946 at the New Britain Conference, when lead researcher Kurt Lewin allowed human relations training group participants to observe researchers' discussions on their perceptions of the training sessions. The study found that participants developed meta-cognitive awareness and demonstrated personal growth after reflecting on their own behavior in relation to the behavior of their fellow participants. These findings led to the development of a formalized "fishbowl dialogue" following already-established caucus-style conferences and resulted in a series of studies on the dynamics of intergroup behavior. Lewin formalized the method into a pedagogical model of sequential activities involving participants meeting with others in their social identity or caucus group (as defined by the focus of the dialogue) in a "fishbowl" in front of the larger group, who listen to the proceedings and later discuss what they hear.[11]

When adapting this model to the virtual MOOC environment, we omitted certain model components, such as the synchronicity of groups observing and participating in the fishbowl dialogue. Our students were logging into the classroom from around the world at different times, so we found a way to scaffold intergroup contact effects via fishbowl dialogue without the traditional in-person, synchronous engagement. After consideration, we decided to host a series of online, asynchronous discussions with distinct phases indicating when different students could participate in each forum thread.

We began the exercise by asking our 20,000+ MOOC students to consider terrorism as a complex and nuanced topic, lacking a single definition or evaluation standard. We next asked students to consider how an individual's personal experiences, social identities, and implicit and explicit biases contribute to how we understand terrorism and how we discuss the topic. We then created a space in the forum dedicated specifically for sharing and assessing personal experiences with and interpretations of

terrorism. This functioned to demarcate these threads as places for sharing personal experiences to help prime students who might otherwise feel they had nothing to contribute (such as prior work experience or prior studies related to terrorism). Within this space dedicated to personal reflection, we created 13 forum threads, dividing our initial phase of discussion into the geographic regions that START researchers created for coding and classifying terrorism within the GTD.[12] The first of three phases of the exercise asked students to choose a forum corresponding to a geographic region in which they had lived, worked, studied, or traveled extensively; we did not assign them to a particular forum based on our assumptions around which region would be most salient to their identity, but we did constrain their choices by asking them to affiliate with a specific region while leaving open the opportunity to choose which region they chose and how they related to it. We then asked them to engage in a discussion within their regional thread guided by the following questions:

- What is your personal experience with terrorism, or what is its prevalence in your region?
- How would you rate the level of fear over the threat of terrorism in your daily life? In your community? Within your region?
- How do you think the rest of the world perceives the threat of terrorism in your region? Do you think there are misconceptions or generalizations? What would you want to clarify or let someone unfamiliar with the problem know in terms of how they associate terrorism with your region?

Phase 1 spanned the first ten days of the course and served as the "caucus" portion of the exercise.

Next, Phase 2—the "fishbowl" discussion portion—of our exercise began and spanned the next five days. At this point, we asked students to select a second region, review the forum's dialogue from Phase 1, and begin commenting on what they had read. Over the next five days, students were to make at least one post in their Phase 2 region, discussing trends they observed in the discussion, as well as insights or knowledge they gained from reading the dialogue. After that, we began Phase 3, where we asked students to select a third region and repeat the process from Phase 2. When all three phases concluded, we asked students to write an essay reflecting on their experiences and discussions.

Discussants included past victims of terrorist attacks, including a hostage in the Westgate Mall attack in Kenya, a hostage in the hijacking of

TWA Flight 741, and an individual who described the experience of activating an emergency operations plan after a nearby IRA bombing. We also heard from students whose work was to respond to terrorist attacks in various ways: we met a Cameroon-based poster who worked with refugees from terrorism-related violence in Mali, as well as many military officers, law enforcement and security professionals, and emergency responders whose careers required them to experience terrorist threats and/or attacks. Posters shared experiences witnessing terrorist attacks firsthand, such as a student who worked across the street from the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris, and a student who watched the World Trade Center collapse from a rooftop in New Jersey. Perhaps most interestingly, in the midst of these discussions, we heard from individuals with ties to current and former radicals. The result was a rich, multifaceted dialogue.

We also had the opportunity to see thousands of students engage in unique cross-cultural analyses and inquiries. An American poster interested in playing an activist role in combating terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa considered the role of American citizens in the region. Posters offered insights into how dialogue in different regions varied from one another. One poster indicated that he learned more about a region in two hours of reading the dialogue for his Phase 2 assignment, than he had in all of his formal schooling. With 20,000+ students, we expected tense exchanges. We were asking individuals to bring personal experiences, identities, and beliefs to a discussion of conflict. For some participants, this may have been the first educational setting in which they were asked to do this. However, some students worked through tense exchanges to come to important conclusions, as illustrated in this excerpt from the forums:

> **Student 1:** ***Terrorism is a common threat to*** **[*humanity*]. *An emotional approach will never help us to sort out this problem.***
> Student 2: *I agree … but unless we are emotionally moved to do something about it, we won't invest the resources necessary to overcome it.*

Conclusion

A scholarly analysis of the impact and effectiveness of the MOOC Fishbowl and Caucus exercise is ongoing. We invoke the exercise in this essay not to state definitively that we were able to create conditions of intergroup contact. Instead, we invoke the exercise in this essay to illustrate one way in which START is currently working to transform components of our

security studies education to align with evolutions in the ways that scholars and practitioners talk about terrorism and security, reflecting a twenty-first-century security environment marked by social and technological change. The goal of this single exercise is to encourage students to bring their personal experiences to bear on academic theories; to move between micro- and macro-level understandings of "terrorism" and "security" by thinking through not only their own experiences, but thinking through and responding to other people's experiences; to develop the critical reflexivity and empathy skills that come from analyzing self and other; and to do so in a purely virtual environment. While asking students to develop critical competencies of peacebuilding—empathy, relationship-building, creativity, and adaptability—this exercise exemplifies our goals of asking students to engage with the self, the other, and the broader social context so that we can engage students in "education *for* peace," in which we build a global citizenry informed about the multifaceted and complex phenomenon of terrorism, while also engaging students in "education *about* peace" and the cultural and technological competencies increasingly necessary for preventing violent extremism and promoting positive peace.

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Notes

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